Waiting for Godot

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SAMUEL BECKETT

Samuel Beckett grew up in Dublin and attended Trinity College, Dublin, where he studied French, English, and Italian. After graduating, he taught in Paris, where he met fellow modernist Irish writer James Joyce and worked on both critical and creative writings. He moved back to Ireland in 1930, when he took up a job as a lecturer at Trinity College. He soon quit the job, though, in 1931, and traveled around Europe, continuing to write. He moved to Paris in 1937, stayed there when World War II began in 1939, and joined French Resistance forces when the Nazis occupied the country. Meanwhile, he continued to write, including a trilogy of well-known novels (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*). But it was for his experimental plays that he would become best known, especially *Waiting for Godot*, which premiered in Paris (in its original French) in 1953. This was followed by more plays, including the equally experimental *Endgame*. Beckett's literary reputation and acclaim steadily improved in the 1960s, and he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 (he gave away the prize money.) Beckett died in 1989 and was buried in Paris along with his wife.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The play is set in a strange, unspecified time, and does not take place in the context of any historical events, but many have seen the widespread suffering and disillusionment caused by World War II in the background of the play's pessimistic, nihilistic conception of the world.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While the play generally does not allude to other pieces of literature, Beckett was likely influenced by *Bérénice*, a 17th-century play by the French playwright Jean Racine (whom Beckett studied), in which Racine stressed the importance of making an interesting play out of little action. Beckett was also probably influenced by Sartre's play *No Exit*, in which characters are trapped in one location. Waiting for Godot has also been seen as being an influence for Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*
- **When Written:** 1948-1949
- **Where Written:** Paris
- **When Published:** 1954
- **Literary Period:** Modernism, Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Drama, Tragicomedy (a mixture of tragedy and comedy), Theater of the Absurd
- **Setting:** The side of an unidentified road, near a tree, at an unspecified time.
- **Climax:** Beckett's play essentially lacks a climax. Vladimir and Estragon spend both acts waiting for the arrival of Godot, but Godot never comes.
- **Antagonist:** While Vladimir and Estragon speak of an anonymous "they" who threaten to beat them and from whom they must hide, there is no real antagonist in the play. Part of the characters' predicament is that there is no precise cause or origin of the suffering and alienation they feel.

EXTRA CREDIT

En Attendant Godot. Beckett originally wrote *Waiting for Godot* in French (under the equivalent title, *En Attendant Godot*). He said that writing in French made it easier to write in the blank, plain style for which the play is famous. Beckett later personally translated the play into English.

Waiting for Whom? While Godot is such an important part of the play, there is widespread disagreement over the correct pronunciation of his name. Some opt for stressing the first syllable ("GOD-oh"), which emphasizes the name's link to God, while others choose to stress the second ("god-OH").

PLOT SUMMARY

Vladimir and Estragon wait at the side of a road, near a tree, agreeing that there is "nothing to be done." Estragon struggles to take off one of his boots. Vladimir asks if Estragon has ever read the Bible. Estragon says all he remembers are some colored maps of the holy land. Vladimir tells Estragon about the two thieves crucified along with Jesus. One of the gospels says that one of the thieves was saved, but Vladimir wonders if this is true. Estragon wants to leave, but Vladimir reminds him that they have to wait here for Godot. Estragon and Vladimir debate whether they are in the right place and whether it is the right day for Godot to come. Estragon falls asleep and Vladimir immediately wakes him, saying he was lonely without him. Estragon starts to describe his dream, but Vladimir angrily stops him and tells him to keep his nightmares to himself.

Vladimir wonders what he and Estragon should do, and Estragon says they should continue to wait. While waiting, Estragon suggests they hang themselves on the tree. The two

disagree over who should hang himself first, though, and Vladimir concludes that they should just wait for Godot. Estragon asks what Vladimir asked Godot for and Vladimir says that he made a vague sort of prayer. Estragon is hungry, and Vladimir offers him a carrot. All he can find in his pockets, though, are turnips. Finally, he finds a carrot and gives it to Estragon. Estragon asks if they are "tied" to Godot and Vladimir says that they are. The two are interrupted by a loud scream off-stage.

Pozzo and Lucky enter. Pozzo drives Lucky forward with a whip like a pack animal, with a rope tied around his neck. Lucky is forced to carry Pozzo's things. Estragon asks if this is Godot, but then Pozzo introduces himself. He jerks the rope that is around Lucky's neck and calls him "pig." Lucky brings him his stool and some food. Pozzo eats some chicken and Estragon begs him for the leftover bones. Pozzo gives him the bones. Vladimir is outraged at Pozzo's horrible treatment of Lucky and wants to leave. Pozzo tells him to stay, though, in case Godot should show up. Estragon asks why Lucky doesn't put down his bags. Pozzo says that Lucky has the right to put them down and be comfortable, so he must be carrying them because he wants to. He says that Lucky is trying to impress Pozzo so he won't get rid of him, because Pozzo has plenty of slaves. Pozzo says he plans to sell Lucky at a fair. Lucky begins to cry and Pozzo gives Estragon a handkerchief to bring to him. Estragon approaches Lucky and Lucky kicks him violently in the shin.

Pozzo then begins to cry, saying that he "can't bear it." Vladimir scolds Lucky for making his master cry. Pozzo collects himself and looks for his pipe, which he has misplaced. He makes a speech about night and twilight, then asks if there's anything he can do for Estragon and Vladimir, since they have been nice to him. He offers to make Lucky dance, recite, sing, or think for their entertainment. Lucky dances and his hat falls off. Pozzo says that Lucky needs his hat to think, so Vladimir places it back on Lucky's head and Lucky launches into a long, rambling monologue. Pozzo prepares to leave and says goodbye to Vladimir and Estragon, but doesn't move.

Pozzo and Lucky eventually leave, and Estragon wants to leave as well, but Vladimir tells him they need to stay and wait for Godot. A boy comes onstage, bearing a message from Godot. He says Godot will not come today, but will come the next day. He tells Vladimir that he works for Godot, minding his goats, and says that Godot is a good master. The boy leaves and Estragon and Vladimir are ready to leave for the night. They say they are going to leave, but stay still. The first act ends.

The second act begins the next day, in the same location and at the same time. Vladimir enters and sings. Estragon enters and tells Vladimir that he was beaten the previous night for no reason. Vladimir and Estragon embrace, happy to see each other again, and Estragon asks what they should do. Vladimir tells him they should wait for Godot. Vladimir mentions Pozzo and Lucky, and Estragon doesn't remember who these people are. He also doesn't recognize the place where they are waiting from the day before. Vladimir says that he and Estragon picked grapes for the same man a long time ago in "the Macon country," but Estragon doesn't remember this, either.

After a long silence, Vladimir asks Estragon to talk about anything to fill the silence, but the two struggle to find something to talk about. Vladimir asks if Estragon really doesn't remember Lucky and Pozzo. Estragon remembers someone kicking him and remembers the chicken bones he got from Pozzo. Vladimir offers Estragon a radish or turnip, because he has no carrots. Estragon falls asleep but then wakes up startled. He begins to tell Vladimir about his dream but Vladimir interrupts him and tells him not to describe the dream. Estragon wants to leave, but Vladimir reminds him that they have to stay and wait for Godot. Vladimir notices Lucky's hat lying on the ground and tries it on. He and Estragon trade their hats and Lucky's hat back and forth, trying different ones on. Vladimir wants to "play at Pozzo and Lucky," and he and Estragon pretend to be the two characters.

Estragon leaves the stage for a moment and then returns and says that "they" are coming. He and Vladimir hold lookouts at either end of the stage. After insulting each other, they make up and embrace. Pozzo and Lucky enter. Pozzo is now blind, following closely behind Lucky. Lucky stops when he sees Vladimir and Estragon, and Pozzo bumps into him. They both fall to the ground and Pozzo cannot get up. Vladimir and Estragon consider trying to get something out of Pozzo for helping him up. Pozzo cries out for help and offers money in return for any assistance. Vladimir decides to help Pozzo up but falls over himself in the process. Estragon tries to help Vladimir up, but falls down in the process. None of the characters are able to get up for a while, but Estragon suddenly suggests that he and Vladimir try to stand up and they are able to get up easily.

Estragon again wants to leave, but Vladimir tells him to keep waiting. He suggests they help Pozzo to get up in the meantime. They stand Pozzo up, and he asks who they are, not remembering either of them from the previous day. Pozzo asks what time it is and Estragon thinks it's morning, while Vladimir is sure that it's evening. Vladimir asks when Pozzo went blind, and Pozzo says that "the blind have no notion of time." He asks Estragon to check on Lucky. Estragon goes over to Lucky and kicks him repeatedly. Pozzo shouts, "Up pig!" and yanks on Lucky's rope. The two leave the stage, as Estragon falls asleep. Vladimir wakes Estragon, saying he was lonely.

Just like the day before, a boy enters with a message from Godot, that he will not come this day but will certainly come the next. Vladimir asks the boy what Godot does and the boy says Godot does nothing. Vladimir asks the boy to tell Godot that he saw Vladimir. The boy leaves. Estragon wants to go far away, but Vladimir says they can't go far, as they have to come back here tomorrow and wait for Godot. Estragon suggests they

hang themselves on the tree using his belt, but when they test the belt's strength by pulling on either end, it breaks. Vladimir and Estragon prepare to leave for the night. They say they are going to leave, but neither moves.

CHARACTERS

Estragon – One of the two main characters of the play, along with Vladimir, Estragon is rather helpless on his own. In the beginning of the play, he struggles just to take off his boots, for example. Unlike Vladimir, he has no grasp of time, and is confused as to whether it is evening or morning in act two. Along similar lines, he has a poor grasp of people's identities. He doesn't recognize Lucky and Pozzo in act two, and at one point thinks Pozzo's name is Abel. He cannot even remember his own past, and tells Pozzo his name is Adam. Estragon repeatedly wants to leave, but each time Vladimir reminds him that they must stay and wait for Godot. While he often forms the dull-minded counterpoint to the more cerebral Vladimir, Estragon is still able to match Vladimir's verbal wit and once claims that he used to be a poet.

Vladimir – Perhaps the real protagonist of the play, Vladimir often seems to be more rational than his more nonsensical companion, Estragon. Unlike the other characters in the play, he has a sense of linear time and realizes that the events of act two essentially repeat those of act one. He is also able to remember people's identities, unlike Estragon and Pozzo, who forget each other in act two. He seems to be the only one who is really outraged at Pozzo's horrible treatment of Lucky in act one, but he doesn't actually do anything to help him. Vladimir often tries to explain what is going on in the world—where they are, when they are—and to show evidence to support his theories. But such rational or "scientific" efforts never yield any solid insight, and by the end of the play Vladimir seems less sure than he did at the beginning. Vladimir relies upon Estragon's company as much as Estragon relies upon Vladimir: whenever Estragon leaves the stage for a brief moment, Vladimir panics out of his intense fear of loneliness and abandonment.

Godot – While Godot never appears on stage or has any lines, he is such a significant absence in the play that he may be rightly recognized as one of the play's characters. What little we can gather about Mr. Godot comes from the dialogue of Estragon, Vladimir, and the boy he sends to deliver his message. The boy says that he watches over Godot's goats, and describes Godot as a relatively kind master. Whoever Godot is, Vladimir and Estragon are convinced that he alone will save them, so they wait endlessly for his arrival, which never comes. Because of his name's resemblance to God, Godot is often read as Beckett's pessimistic version of God, an absent savior who never comes to the aid of those suffering on earth.

Pozzo – Pozzo runs into Vladimir and Estragon while journeying along the road in both acts. He abuses Lucky and treats him as a slave, pulling him around with a rope tied around his neck and having him carry all his things. While he exercises some relative power and authority over Lucky and acts superior to the other characters, he is nonetheless far from powerful himself. He panics when he loses things like his watch and is doomed to repeat his wandering every day, just as Vladimir and Estragon repeat their waiting for Godot. He is particularly helpless in act two, when he is inexplicably struck blind and is unable to get up after falling to the ground.

Lucky – Lucky is Pozzo's slave, whom Pozzo treats horribly and continually insults, addressing him only as "pig." He is mostly silent in the play, but gives a lengthy, mostly nonsensical monologue in act one, when Pozzo asks him to think out loud. While all the characters on-stage suffer in different ways throughout the play, Lucky is the play's most obvious figure of physical suffering and exploitation as he is whipped, beaten, and kicked by other characters.

Boy – The unnamed boy who brings a message from Godot in both acts. Both times, he tells Vladimir and Estragon that Godot is not coming, but will come the next day. It is unclear whether the same boy comes in both acts, or whether these are two different characters. In act two, the boy claims to be different from the boy of act one, but then again Pozzo claims in act two that he did not meet Vladimir and Estragon in act one. The boy describes working under Godot as if on a farm or plantation, where he watches over Godot's animals. When the boy asks Vladimir if he would like to send a message to Godot, Vladimir asks him to tell Godot simply that he saw Vladimir.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

HUMOR AND THE ABSURD

Waiting for Godot is a prime example of what has come to be known as the theater of the absurd. The play is filled with nonsensical lines, wordplay, meaningless dialogue, and characters who abruptly shift emotions and forget everything, ranging from their own identities to what happened yesterday. All of this contributes to an absurdist humor throughout the play. However, this humor is often uncomfortably mixed together with tragic or serious content to make a darker kind of comedy. Estragon refers to "billions of others," who have been killed, and describes being beaten by an anonymous "they." Lucky (whose ill-fitting name is

itself darkly comic) is treated horribly and physically abused on-stage. And Vladimir and Estragon talk nonchalantly and pleasantly about suicide. All this has a discomforting effect on the audience, who is not sure how to react to this absurd mixture of comedy and tragedy, seriousness and playfulness. In act one, Vladimir says, "one daren't even laugh any more," and his comment could apply well to the audience of Beckett's play, who don't know whether to laugh or to cringe at the events on-stage. The absurdity caused by the seeming mismatch between characters' tones and the content of their speech can be seen as a reaction to a world emptied of meaning and significance. If the world is meaningless, it makes no sense to see it as comic or tragic, good or bad. Beckett thus presents an eerie play that sits uneasily on the border between tragedy and comedy, in territory one can only call the absurd.

WAITING, BOREDOM, AND NIHILISM

As Beckett's title indicates, the central act of the play is waiting, and one of the most salient aspects of the play is that nothing really seems to happen. Vladimir and Estragon spend the entire play waiting for Godot, who never comes. Estragon repeatedly wants to leave, but Vladimir insists that they stay, in case Godot actually shows up. As a result of this endless waiting, both Vladimir and Estragon are "bored to death," as Vladimir himself puts it. Both Vladimir and Estragon repeat throughout the play that there is "nothing to be done" and "nothing to do." They struggle to find ways to pass the time, so they end up conversing back and forth about nothing at all—including talking about how they don't know what to talk about—simply to occupy themselves while waiting. The boredom of the characters on-stage mirrors the boredom of the audience. Beckett has deliberately constructed a play where not only his characters, but also his audience wait for something that never happens. Just like Estragon and Vladimir, the audience waits during the play for some major event or climax that never occurs. Audience members might at times feel uncomfortable and want, like Estragon, to leave, but are bound to stay, in case Godot should actually arrive later in the play.

All of this waiting for nothing, talking about nothing, and doing nothing contributes to a pervasive atmosphere of nihilism in the play. Broadly defined, nihilism is a denial of any significance or meaning in the world. Deriving from the Latin word for "nothing" (***nihil***), it is a worldview centered around negation, claiming that there is no truth, morality, value, or—in an extreme form—even reality. This seems to describe the world of the play, largely emptied out of meaning, emotion, and substance, leading to characters who blather on endlessly in insignificant conversation. Given the play's deep exploration of the absurd humor and feelings of alienation that arise from this nihilistic understanding of the world, one could say that ***Waiting for Godot*** is, at its core, about nothing.

MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

Written in 1953, ***Waiting for Godot*** was a somewhat late successor to the vibrant experimentation in art and literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries known as Modernism. Modernist writers saw themselves as dramatically breaking with the past and innovating in all aspects of art, literature, and culture. Beckett's play shares with Modernist works a fascination with pushing the boundaries of literary genre, representation, and etiquette, as well as an interest in language and thought prioritized above action and plot. However, the play can also be seen as somewhat Postmodern, belonging to the literary and artistic period following Modernism. Both Modernism and Postmodernism are rather vague terms, often used differently by different critics. Moreover, it is also debated whether Postmodernism continues the aspirations of Modernism, or is a more radical break with it. In any case, Beckett's play sits on the fence between these two movements.

While Postmodernism is difficult to define exactly, ***Waiting for Godot*** displays a number of the defining features of a Postmodern conception of the world. One of these is an alienation from tradition and a questioning of the grand narratives that were previously seen to have some kind of authority. This includes grand narratives of historical progress—that history is the story of human life continually getting better—as well as religious narratives like the Bible. There are some biblical and classical references in the play, but they are only used ironically. Estragon compares himself to Christ in act one, for example, but the comparison is rather ridiculous. And Pozzo invokes "Atlas, son of Jupiter!" but doesn't actually believe in the force of this classical reference (what's more, he gets his mythological family tree wrong). The religious and cultural traditions of the past have lost their authority and centrality in the world of the play. Another Postmodern feature of the play is a pervasive sense of entrapment or enslavement, but a lack of any central authority. Characters are often unable to move or get up from the ground for no apparent reason. Vladimir and Estragon are, in a sense, trapped in their place of waiting, even though no one is forcing them to stay. Pozzo is Lucky's master, but he is far from free or powerful. Everyone in the play seems to be trapped or enslaved in some way, but no one seems to be the master. The characters of *Waiting for Godot* are also profoundly disoriented: they don't know where, or when, they are. At times, the characters don't even know who they are, as Estragon cannot remember his own past, for example. Finally, some of Beckett's characters feel a separation from reality. Both Vladimir and Pozzo question, in act two, whether they are actually awake or are simply dreaming. This confusion of reality with a dream or a false representation is a central, common feature of Postmodernism.

Seeing Beckett's play as Postmodernist is more than just labeling it as part of a particular literary movement; it gets to

the heart of the world Beckett represents, one defined by alienation, entrapment, disorientation, and a questioning of reality. With the play's lack of specifics regarding its place or time, the circumstances of its events, or the particular back stories of its characters, *Waiting for Godot* can even be seen as a kind of allegory for the Postmodern condition. Beckett wrote his play before Postmodernism really coalesced or was written about as a distinct period or movement. Nonetheless, while in some ways still belonging to Modernism, the play presciently depicts many of the defining aspects of a Postmodern world. In representing these negative features, the play can be seen as either a pessimistic indictment of the present or as a chilling warning of what the future might look like: as how Beckett saw the world to be or as he feared it might become.

TIME

Closely related to the Modernist and Postmodernist aspects of Beckett's play is its conception of time, an issue of fascination to Modernists and Postmodernists alike. Perhaps the most important thing about time in the play is that it is uncertain. All of the characters (and thus the audience, as well) are unsure of exactly when the play is taking place. The time period of the play is unclear, as is the relative chronology of the play's events. Vladimir is rather sure that act two is one day after act one, but all the other characters disagree. Moreover, everyone except for Vladimir seems to have forgotten the events of act one by the time act two begins. In act two, Vladimir and Estragon even disagree over what time of day it is.

Amid all this uncertainty, the one thing that seems certain is that time is recursive in *Waiting for Godot*. That is, the same events occur again and again, while characters also repeat themselves. As Pozzo and Estragon forget their immediate past, they end up repeating much of act one in act two. Vladimir and Estragon wait in the same place, where the same two people (Lucky and Pozzo) encounter them, and where a boy delivers the same message from Godot. Vladimir himself wonders to what degree the events of act two are an exact repetition of those in act one, as he asks whether Lucky and Pozzo are the same characters from the previous day, and whether it is the same young boy, or a different one. The boy claims to be a different boy from that of act one, and Pozzo does not remember Vladimir or Estragon, but given all of the forgetfulness in the play, Vladimir's questions remain unanswered.

With this strangely repetitive temporal structure, the characters of *Waiting for Godot* are trapped within an infinite present time. "Time has stopped," says Vladimir in act one. Indeed, the ending of the play seems somewhat arbitrary. It could have continued on for however many acts, endlessly repeating, as Vladimir and Estragon endlessly await the arrival of the mysterious Mr. Godot. Moreover, it is not clear that the beginning of the play was really the beginning of this story. How many days did Estragon and Vladimir come to the same part of the road and have essentially the same conversation before the day of act one?

HUMANITY, COMPANIONSHIP, SUFFERING, AND DIGNITY

Beckett's play is filled with a great deal of physical, mental, and emotional suffering. Vladimir and Estragon (especially Estragon) are starved for food, in physical pain, and "bored to death." Both fear an anonymous "they" who threaten to beat them at night, and are frequently unable to move of their own accord. Estragon mentions "billions of others," who have been killed, but does not elaborate. Lucky, meanwhile, is treated horribly, pulled about by a rope tied around his neck, beaten by Pozzo, and kicked repeatedly by Estragon. All of this suffering has a dehumanizing effect, and robs characters of their dignity. Lucky, for example, is addressed by Pozzo as "pig," and treated like a pack animal. Estragon is reduced to sucking on Pozzo's leftover chicken bones pathetically. And even Pozzo, who imposes suffering on Lucky, is unable to get up from the ground when he falls in act two.

Amid all this, Vladimir and Estragon desperately seek two things throughout the play: some recognition of their humanity, and companionship. When the boy asks Vladimir what message he would like to send to Godot, he simply asks the boy to tell Godot that he saw Vladimir. In other words, Vladimir wants to be acknowledged as a person. This is particularly important to him because the other characters in the play forget and mix up their identities. Pozzo and Lucky don't recognize Estragon and Vladimir in act two, whereas Estragon forgets about Lucky and Pozzo. In this environment where people are so easily forgotten, Vladimir wants some confirmation of his own identity and humanity. Beyond this, Vladimir and Estragon also desire companionship. Although Estragon repeatedly suggests that they go their separate ways, the two stay together out of a mutual fear of loneliness. When Estragon momentarily leaves the stage, Vladimir panics and becomes immediately lonely. And Estragon needs Vladimir as well—whether to have someone to talk to and ask questions of, or to help him put on his boots.

Nonetheless, even as Vladimir and Estragon seek some kind of dignity and companionship in the face of suffering, they are remarkably indifferent to the suffering of others. Vladimir is at first outraged at Pozzo's treatment of Lucky, but soon gets used to it and even encourages Estragon to kick him. Vladimir and Estragon converse nonchalantly while Pozzo is stuck on the ground and crying for help in act two, and they first scheme how they might take advantage of him rather than help him. Vladimir and Estragon value their own relationship, but generally fail to sympathize with Pozzo and Lucky as other

potential companions. Beckett suggests that this kind of indifference to the pain of others is what allows the vicious cycle of suffering to continue on indefinitely, as it does in the play.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HATS

Because the play has so few props, the props that do appear onstage take on an exaggerated significance. As one example, Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky, and Pozzo all wear hats and at times seem oddly preoccupied with them. Lucky, for instance, needs his hat to think, and stops his long monologue once his hat is knocked off. In act two Estragon and Vladimir exchange their hats and Lucky's hat back and forth, trying different ones on. Given the importance of these hats to their individual owners, this scene can be seen as representing the fluidity and instability of individual identities in the play. As Pozzo and Lucky don't remember having already seen Vladimir and Estragon in act two, Vladimir begins to wonder whether the Pozzo and Lucky of act two are the same as those of act one. Estragon, for one, does not recognize them, and calls Pozzo Abel. Estragon can't even remember his own past, and at one point tells Pozzo that his name is Adam. Moreover, it is not clear whether the young boy in each act is one boy or two different ones. The boy also calls Vladimir Mr. Albert, which may or may not actually be Vladimir's name. With all of this ambiguity and instability regarding people's identities, the scene of the hat exchange playfully represents an exchange of identities, as Vladimir and Estragon wear different combinations of hats. Vladimir ends up wearing Lucky's hat—notably, the one he needed to "think"—seemingly taking on a new identity, as he then asks Estragon to "play" at being Lucky and Pozzo. Indeed, it's uncertain whether Vladimir and Estragon (or other characters) are actually being themselves throughout the play, or if they even have stable selves they can be.

NAMES

Many of the names in Beckett's play can be seen has having hidden meanings. The most important example is Godot, whose name evokes similarity to God for many readers. Along this reading, Godot symbolizes the salvation that religion promises, but which never comes (just as Godot never actually comes to Vladimir and Estragon). But the similarity between "Godot" and "God" could also be a game Beckett is playing with his audience and readers, a kind of red herring that actually imparts no important information. This would be in line with other character names: Estragon means "tarragon" in French, for example, while Pozzo is Italian for a water well, but these meanings hold little to no significance for those characters. And Lucky's name is anything but fitting, as he is the character who unluckily suffers the most onstage. In the end, Beckett's character names suggest the possibility of meaning but fail to deliver on this promise, just as Godot promises to save Vladimir and Estragon but never shows up. As further examples of the nihilist worldview that pervades *Waiting for Godot*, the play's character names may be significant precisely for being insignificant, meaningful in that they mean nothing.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grove Press edition of *Waiting for Godot* published in 1994.

Act 1 Quotes

"Nothing to be done.

Related Characters: Estragon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

These are the first lines of Beckett's play. They come after a series of simple stage directions that describe Estragon in a barren landscape trying to remove a boot. Even without any context, this quote sets the desolate scene and the desperate tone of the play.

What is remarkable about the pithy line—and this is characteristic of the play—is how many different ideas it references. On the most pragmatic level, Estragon is struggling to remove his boot. But the "nothing" could refer to the general lack of movement and action in the play, and it could also be a nihilistic rejection of a human's ability to do anything. In that sense, the boot becomes a symbol of the fruitlessness of life. So already in the first sentence, we have an introduction of Beckett's main themes: language that negates instead of affirms; hopelessness and despair; and the finding of deep philosophical meaning in actions as banal as removing shoes.

"I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone forever.

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker), Estragon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

Vladimir says this to Estragon the moment he arrives in the scene. Estragon questions whether he is indeed there again, and in response Vladimir repeats how much he appreciates Estragon's presence.

These lines introduce the skepticism of change and development that will preoccupy the characters throughout the play. Estragon is soon revealed to have a terrible memory, often forgetting if he has even been in a certain location. But Vladimir's relatively stronger conviction in his memory is also repeatedly undermined throughout the play. When read with these themes in mind, the beginning of the text poses an odd question: Has Vladimir actually been gone long from Estragon's side? Perhaps he has been there almost the entire time, and his sense of "forever" has just been deeply warped—as time is often warped in the play. The term "back" is similarly perplexing, for the characters constantly repeat themselves, seeming to exist in a series of constant returns in which they reiterate their lives, always coming "back."

❝ When I think of it... all these years... but for me... where would you be... *(Decisively.)* You'd be nothing more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker), Estragon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Vladimir here responds to Estragon having forgotten about where and in what conditions he spent the previous night. Though he believes he was in a ditch and was beaten, Estragon cannot recall the events with any certainty, and Vladimir expresses frustration at Estragon's inability to take order of his own life.

These lines are Vladimir's first claim on being the more responsible of the two characters. He takes on a disgruntled paternal role, claiming that if not for him, Estragon could never have survived the perilous world. In doing so, he defines a clear time scale for their relationship with "all these years." We are not just seeing the meeting of two travelers or recent friends. Presumably they have been living in the desolate space of the play for a long, long time—a length in direct contrast to the brevity of "the present minute." He also implies that their present state is preferable to death—which may seem like a given in any work of art, but is certainly not in Beckett. Considering a series of later references to suicide and death, this early implication that Estragon's life is worth preservation should not go unnoticed.

❝ One daren't even laugh any more.
Dreadful privation.
Merely smile. *(He smiles suddenly from ear to ear, keeps smiling, ceases as suddenly.)* It's not the same thing. Nothing to be done.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

These lines follow Vladimir's laughter at the suggestion that the two repent being born, perhaps as if doing so would allow them to escape their horrible predicament. Vladimir first denies the validity of that laughter, then tries to mimic its feeling with a smile, before rapidly denying the smile's efficacy.

Rejecting the value of humor, even dark humor, helps clarify the depths of nihilism in which the play exists. Though Vladimir has a natural impulse to laugh at the joke, he self-censors—as if something about the environment renders any levity entirely unacceptable. Then he tries to artificially perform a similar smile, but that attempt results in a repetition of the play's opening denial line. "Nothing to be done," then, refers also to the loss of certain human emotions and the inability for Vladimir to recover joy or laughter in the current situation.

Yet this is not to say that *Waiting for Godot* as a work of art is entirely devoid of humor. Beckett deemed it a tragicomedy, implying that it was supposed to create at least a partially humorous effect for the reader. And Estragon's line about "dreadful privation" is rather ironically funny: His high-flung vocabulary strikes as intentionally out of place and out of character. It is a humorous line for the audience even if it can only create a failed false smile for Vladimir.

You're sure it was this evening?
What?
That we were to wait.
He said Saturday. *(Pause.)* I think

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker), Godot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

The two speak here about their anticipation for the play's titular "Godot." Yet instead of expressing confidence in his arrival, they reveal a complete lack of certainty.

The vagueness of their knowledge parallels the earlier stage direction which specified only "evening" with no indication as to day or era. That choice left the viewer or reader untethered to time, and these lines shows that the characters exist in a corresponding state. (It is always important, with Beckett, to distinguish when certain confusions or clarities are inherent to the world of the text and thus experienced by the characters, or whether they stem from the audience's distance from the world.) Here, the play's bizarre, timeless space is a common feature between audience and character. In particular, Estragon and Vladimir are deeply challenged by the simple activity of arranging a meeting. In their their reality, time cannot be tracked, so even the most basic social functions break down.

But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? *(Pause.)* Or Monday? *(Pause.)* Or Friday?

Related Characters: Estragon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Estragon presses Vladimir on the specifics of the day of the meeting. First he points out that "Saturday" alone does not specify a certain date, and then he goes on to question whether it is even a Saturday at all.

The "I think" of the previous statement, here, grows into a series of frantic days, and it becomes evident that the two cannot at all temporally locate themselves. Estragon's entire faith in the calendar has broken down. Though Vladimir, as the more "sane" character, tries to reassure him, there is a growing sense that neither can make statements with much conviction. As a result, there is no clear indication that the two are in the right spot or at all close to the right time. Already, Beckett implies that their entire waiting experience may be foolhardy. For though they may be performing the correct action—waiting—their inability to keep track of time or track narratives undermines any chance at actually meeting Godot.

I was asleep! (Despairingly.) Why will you never let me sleep?
I felt lonely.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Estragon falls asleep as Vladimir paces, but he is immediately reawakened by a shriek the moment Vladimir perceives him to have dozed off.

This action displays a perplexing mixture of abuse and care in Vladimir and Estragon's relationship. For while Vladimir rudely awakens Estragon—something he has apparently done with some frequency—his explanation also expresses an affection for Estragon's presence. The exchange shows a state of deep dependence between the two. One could easily conclude that the characters despise each other, given their common threats of abandonment. But Beckett here implies that they also have a deep social need to not feel lonely. Setting the play in this desolate landscape, without other social interactions or stability, allows him to showcase the full extent to which humans require mutual contact and mutual recognition.

That choice helps clarify, too, that Vladimir receives a sufficient "benefit" from Estragon in exchange for the parental attention he provides. Their relationship is not indeed as imbalanced as it may first appear, for whatever he might provide, Vladimir requires a corresponding emotional support from Estragon.

What do we do now?
Wait.
Yes, but while waiting.
What about hanging ourselves?
Hmm. It'd give us an erection.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange takes place after a brief silence during which Estragon gazes at the tree—one of the only elements of the stage's set. The two express the desperation induced by the prolonged wait for Godot, and the desolation of the environment surrounding them, as well as the tragic humor lying within that horror.

That Estragon and Vladimir cannot propose anything to do except "wait" recalls the opening line about "Nothing to be done." It is characteristic in this play for any moment of silence to be followed by Estragon's asking what the two should do next. But Vladimir's answer is generally to continue waiting, and his more active suggestions are never acted upon. Here, for instance, suicide is not presented so much as a weighty decision, but rather a flippant reference that they forget about moments later.

It is notable that "hanging ourselves" is not actually suggested as a response to sadness, but rather to boredom. Beckett implies that the most torturous part of the characters' existence is not active pain but rather the lack of motion. The idea that suicide could cause some kind of stimulation through an "erection" gives great excitement to Estragon: He is not enticed by death itself, but just the fact that suicide bestows on him greater agency in dictating his reality. Thus Beckett uses these lines to show how deeply one's perceptions and ideas can be warped by the simple process of waiting. It bestows a passivity that leads the characters to crave action in any way possible, even if that way requires death.

❝ We're not tied?

Related Characters: Estragon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Estragon asks this question twice, with an interlude in between in which he eats a carrot. The first time, the inquiry concerns his and Vladimir's rights, specifically whether they have "lost" them. When Vladimir responds that the process was not so passive and that they actively got rid of their rights, Estragon wonders "feebly" if this gives them more or less agency.

The metaphor of being tied returns the characters to the question of potential suicide by hanging themselves from the tree. That Estragon imagines rights as a process of being "tied" to something implies that rights are a restrictive force—which would perhaps explain why the two got rid of them. And the imagistic connection to suicide also casts being tied in a negative light. Yet Estragon seems more disheartened than elated at the idea of having been, so to speak, cut loose. The implication is, perhaps, that Estragon and Vladimir have left the bonds of normal society and, in doing so, abandoned their rights and entered into a nihilistic and untethered space.

The image will also resurface when Pozzo arrives holding Lucky on a rope. Unlike Vladimir and Estragon, who seek emotional codependence but also seem emotionally adrift, the other two characters are physically bound to each other. Yet doing so has turned Lucky into a slave, removing his rights. Beckett seems to be interrogating, here, the advantages and disadvantages of being socially obliged to others or to a society. Rights can be a form of being tied: They can restrict one, but they also prevent loneliness and offer a sense of connection and social well-being.

❝ To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it. (Pause.) For the moment.

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker), Godot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Vladimir responds, here, to Estragon asking if they are currently tied to Godot. He explains that such an idea would be ridiculous, but then implies that it might be possible and even desirable in the future.

One of the beauties of the play is that "Godot" can be taken as a symbol for many different things: God, a bond to civilization, a rescuer, etc. In the broadest sense, he offers some kind of redemptive alternative to the desperate, unmoored characters. Currently the two remain, without question, not "tied to Godot," for they have not yet made a social connection with them. But whereas Estragon continues to see that lack of being tied as positive, Vladimir

implies with the artful pause and line "For the moment" that they may indeed want to be. Perhaps, after all, escaping the scene would mean becoming "tied" to Godot. On one level, this might simply mean having forged a social connection that requires humane treatment and gives emotional support. On another level, it might mean using Godot to reconnect themselves to a society with rights and social norms.

> You are human beings none the less. *(He puts on his glasses.)* As far as one can see. *(He takes off his glasses.)* of the same species as myself. *(He bursts into an enormous laugh.)* Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image!

Related Characters: Pozzo (speaker), Estragon, Vladimir

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

During the first moments of their conversation, Estragon tells Pozzo they they are not from this area. In response, Pozzo makes this odd appeal to their common humanity, stressing how the characters are all fundamentally the same, in particular through their connection to God.

Pozzo focuses on visual consistencies. Beckett signals this emphasis through the stage direction of putting on and removing glasses. And he indicates that the assertion that they are "human beings" must be confirmed by visual data. Pozzo then moves first into a scientific register of speech with the repetition of "species" and then swaps in religious language with "God's image." This appeal to God would presumably define a social bond between the three of them, but Pozzo speaks the lines mockingly.

The fact that he cites a universal humanity is particularly empty considering his inhumane treatment of Lucky. Taking the two actions together would imply either that Lucky is not human, or that the way Pozzo treats Lucky could be applied to any human—based on their commonality as the "same species." And in the nihilistic setting of the play, in which both God and society seem to have vanished, neither the religious nor the Enlightenment ideal of common humanity has many practical consequences.

> Er... you've finished with the... er... you don't need the... er... bones, Sir?

Related Characters: Estragon (speaker), Pozzo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

After Pozzo has finished eating his chicken and tossed the bones to the ground, Estragon "timidly" wonders whether he can have the remains. He is reproached by Vladimir, but encouraged by Pozzo, who tells him to confirm that Lucky does not want them.

Much of the text focuses on existential despair, but this line returns it to a more practical hardship: hunger. The splendor of Pozzo's meal sharply contrasts with the paucity of Estragon and Vladimir's rotten vegetables, so it is quite reasonable for Estragon to want the bones. Estragon here uses a subservient tone of voice—he stumbles twice, includes three "er"s, and finishes the sentence with a formal "Sir?" Thus he defines himself in a position below Lucky, based on the power and wealth implied by his possession of chicken bones. The line corroborates Estragon's childlike character and also shows how even in this empty, meaningless space, social hierarchies can be rapidly defined based on the possession of a few commodities.

> To treat a man... (gesture towards Lucky)... like that... I think that... no... a human being... no... it's a scandal!

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker), Pozzo, Lucky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Lucky refuses the bones and Pozzo makes a spiteful comment, causing Vladimir to at last speak up against the behavior. He somewhat hesitantly challenges Pozzo on the awful way he treats Lucky.

Vladimir's repeated references to humanity—"man" and "human being"—seem to ironically rephrase Pozzo's earlier comment on how they all are the same species and made in God's image. Here, Vladimir points out the inconsistency in that logic: How could Pozzo actually believe that and still treat Lucky this way? Yet Vladimir protests in a meek and uncertain way, stuttering and self correcting with ellipses and with the injection of "no." Pozzo's relative power in the scene thus prevents Vladimir from any direct challenge,

even if he finds the behavior deplorable. And rather than actually fight Pozzo or seek to free Lucky, Vladimir lets the conversation drift on. Beckett seems to be making a mockery of our wish to pursue human rights by showing how fickle our principles and convictions can be.

> Why he doesn't make himself comfortable? Let's try and get this clear. Has he not the right to? Certainly he has. It follows that he doesn't want to. There's reasoning for you.

Related Characters: Pozzo (speaker), Lucky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

After a series of confused attempts to ask Pozzo why Lucky continues to carry so many bags, Vladimir and Estragon are finally able to communicate their question. In response, Pozzo gives this strange definition of his human autonomy, claiming that Lucky is indeed able to rest.

Pozzo elevates the status of his statement with the phrases "Let's try and get this clear" and "There's reasoning for you." He implies that other dialogue was perhaps not so lucid, and that he will be able to offer a more direct and useful understanding of their dynamics. Between these two phrases lies a distorted proof. Pozzo claims that Lucky is indeed fully autonomous, and that therefore each action he performs is out of complete volition. But, of course, the audience and other characters remain skeptical, for Lucky does not in fact seem to have this professed agency. Pozzo articulates a common despotic or slaveholding justification, in which people with power claim that others could do anything—whereas in reality they are trapped by their circumstance. Beckett seems to showcase the emptiness inherent in forms of human agency: A presumed ability to act only reveals how social forces keep one entrapped.

> He's crying!
> Old dogs have more dignity.

Related Characters: Estragon, Pozzo (speaker), Lucky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Lucky begins crying when Pozzo observes mockingly that the best thing to do would be to kill him. Estragon is moved to an exclamation of pity, but Pozzo is simply disgusted by Lucky's behavior.

This moment of pathos shows, first, that Lucky contains within him a strong emotional capacity—one that can be recognized by others. And it correspondingly shows a lack of empathy in Pozzo, as if Lucky (despite his silence) is in fact the more human of the two. Whereas Vladimir was the one previously morally outraged by Vladimir's actions, here it is Estragon who expresses sadness at what has occurred. Pozzo, however, cares only about "dignity," a term of decorum that mirrors his pompous and stately behavior in the play. The lines shows that while Estragon is more childlike in his actions, this also gives him an increased empathetic capacity—an empathy which Pozzo clearly lacks.

> The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh. *(He laughs.)* Let us not then speak ill of our generation, it is not unhappier than its predecessors. *(Pause.)* Let us not speak well of it either. *(Pause.)* Let us not speak of it at all.

Related Characters: Pozzo (speaker), Lucky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Pozzo offers this theory of world suffering because Estragon has begun to cry after Lucky kicks him in the shins. Previously Lucky shed tears, and Pozzo thus interprets the tears' transfer from Lucky to Estragon as proof that happiness in the world is constant.

To construct this theory, Pozzo begins with the physical detail he has just observed: "quantity" is "constant" because when Lucky stopped crying, Estragon started. Applying the same idea to laughter casts Vladimir's earlier insistence that he not laugh in an intriguing light: It is as if Vladimir was generously leaving the laughter with others, whereas Pozzo steals it without a second thought. And from these two principles on crying and laughing, Pozzo concludes that no evaluative assessment can be made of any "generation," for all eras have a consistent distribution of joy.

The philosophical underpinning of this relativism is that happiness and sadness are constantly being redistributed. Yet two sub-interpretations of this philosophy are possible: Either this is a pseudo-spiritual model in which happiness is regulated by a universal (perhaps divine) force, or it is a model in which human agents themselves change quantities of happiness by taking it away from others. In the second option, Lucky stopped crying only because he harmed Estragon. Beckett puts emphasis on this distinction by making Pozzo a slave-owner: He has profited from Lucky's misery and thus has more resources than Estragon or Vladimir, who have a more equitable relationship. After all, it's to Pozzo's advantage to have formulated a theory that justifies his spiteful and selfish behaviors.

> After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like a... like a banana skin. Really...

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker), Pozzo, Lucky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Vladimir makes another protest against Pozzo's behavior after learning that Lucky has served him for 60 years. He is aghast that Pozzo would dispose of Lucky so flippantly.

To fortify this position, Vladimir summons the image of a banana, charging Pozzo with having treated Lucky simply like a foodstuff. Lucky is, by this account, to be consumed at will and then gotten rid of when he has been depleted. The image should be taken as appropriate considering the play's focus on food. Remember, Estragon and Vladimir's spartan resources were directly contrasted with Pozzo's luxury—a luxury presumably furnished by Lucky's role as a slave. Thus Vladimir takes the food metaphor from an indirect relationship—in which Pozzo consumes food from his possession of Lucky—into a direct one: his actual possession of Lucky.

> (to Lucky.) How dare you! It's abominable! Such a good master! Crucify him like that! After so many years! Really!

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker), Pozzo, Lucky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Only moments after Vladimir accuses Pozzo of having treated Lucky like a banana, he switches his perspective entirely. At the mere suggestion from Pozzo that he has been indirectly abused by Lucky, Vladimir immediately becomes sympathetic to the slaveholder and chastises Lucky instead.

These lines clarify the nature of the flippancy in Vladimir's character. As we have already noted, Vladimir often makes comments in protest but never follows them with action. Here the reason is not cowardice but rather distraction. Just a single comment from Pozzo immediately makes Vladimir consider Lucky's actions "abominable" and presents Pozzo as both "master" and martyr through the term "crucify." This shift demonstrates that human moral codes are weak not necessarily because a character or person is evil, but simply because of how fickle human memory and attention are. Vladimir is generally presented as more attentive and aware than Estragon, but even here he cannot maintain a logical train of thought.

> Do I look like a man that can be made to suffer?

Related Characters: Pozzo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

After an outburst of tears, Pozzo controls his sentiments and denies that he was genuinely upset. Then he argues he has complete emotional control and cannot, in fact, suffer at all.

On a character level, these lines speak to the egoism of Pozzo's personality—in which he wants to be seen as stoic and superior by all around him. The comment also intersects importantly with Pozzo's earlier theory about the relative state of human suffering. Previously, he argued that suffering was constant and simply redistributed among humans, and here he seems to imply that he is impervious to that system. All suffering, by thos account, will be hoisted onto those around him. Yet Pozzo has clearly experienced some level of suffering at the hands of Lucky. Thus even the

most "empowered" character in the play, the one performing acts of great cruelty, still reveals insecurities and expresses a suppressed wish to flee pain.

So that I ask myself is there anything I can do in my turn for these honest fellows who are having such a dull, dull time. Even ten francs would be a help.
We are not beggars!

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

In an unusual moment of generosity, Pozzo offers his assistance to Vladimir and Estragon. As he did with the chicken bones, Estragon immediately requests some tangible benefit (in this case money), whereas Vladimir reproaches him for the discourteous behavior. Pozzo, however, somewhat snidely notes that talking to the two of them should be sufficient payment.

The lines notably introduce money into the play for the first time. This detail might seem unimportant, but Beckett's text could easily take place in a post-apocalyptic world in which economical systems have entirely disappeared. (After all, time seems to have stopped or at least behaves in very odd ways.) So the idea that francs could actually benefit Estragon and Vladimir reveals that currency still plays a role in the world of the play—or at least that Estragon believes it will. Vladimir, similarly, upholds a sort of social norm by not wanting to grovel before Pozzo.

Pozzo's decision to withhold money seems simply ruthless. But, in a sense, his conversation *has* given more to the characters than ten francs would: It has offered a temporary antidote to nothing happening. And indeed, his comment that they "are having such a dull, dull time" shows an odd awareness of the value of action amidst boredom. Beckett seems to be making a sly joke that anything staving off the nihilistic horror of boredom is worth more than currency.

He thinks?
Certainly. Aloud. He even used to think very prettily once, I could listen to him for hours. Now... *(he shudders)*.

Related Characters: Vladimir, Pozzo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

As Pozzo prepares to have Lucky perform for Vladimir and Estragon, he notes that one option is for Lucky to "think." Vladimir is naturally taken aback, considering that Lucky has not yet produced a single real utterance, and Pozzo asserts he can, but also indicates this behavior is now somewhat horrifying.

We see here a crucial revision to Lucky's character. He is not, as we might think, inherently silent or disabled. Rather he used to be highly capable and has only recently descended into his current maligned state. The lines also clarify why Pozzo may now find him torturous to be around—for the way he performs is frightening instead of enjoyable.

"Thinking" is also presented here as a pragmatic action: It is not just a natural process that humans do, but something that can be cultivated and performed for others. Furthermore, Pozzo's use of the term "prettily" implies that thinking quality can be assessed on some kind of scale. There are better and worse thinkers; ones that are beautiful and ones that make one shudder. Beckett may be making a snide comment here about the class of intellectuals who presume themselves to be above other entertainers, when in reality what they do is just another type of performance art.

He used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the fandango, and even the hornpipe. He capered. For joy.
Now that's the best he can do. Do you know what he calls it?
The Scapegoat's Agony.
The Hard Stool.
The Net. He thinks he's entangled in a net.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo (speaker), Lucky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

After Lucky performs, Pozzo observes sadly that he used to be far better. He lists the previous more artful dances Lucky once knew, and then asks Estragon and Vladimir to guess at

the name of the recent one.

Most simply, these lines reconfirm that Lucky has degenerated from a previous more talented condition. But the more interesting side of the passages lies in how Estragon, Vladimir, and Pozzo describe the dance. The potential titles from each describe a state of hopelessness: Estragon points at how Lucky is a scapegoat for Pozzo's hatred; Vladimir puns on stool to mean both an immobile seat and a painful bowel movement; and Pozzo describes the dance as expressing entrapment. Beckett implies that Lucky's previous talents have—perhaps due to Pozzo, perhaps due to other forces—been reduced to a constant sense of being stuck and punished. Even a talent defined by movement is reduced to a lack of movement.

It is notable, too, that whereas the other dances are all recognizable forms and thus are lowercase, non-proper nouns, the actual dance has a unique title. Beckett seems to present it as an experimental form of art, more an expression of the self than a routine performance of previously-designed steps. This may be a subtle reference to twentieth-century modern dance, which deviates from pre-established form to such an extent that the motion often becomes grotesque.

❝ Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!

Related Characters: Estragon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Here Estragon repeats what is by now the chorus of the play. He articulates once more the horrifying boredom that evidently cannot be abated even by the actions of Pozzo and Lucky.

Estragon notably expands the opening line—"Nothing to be done."—into a series of longer formulations. First, we learn that "Nothing happens": no external events take place. Then, he focuses on the actions of people, for "nobody comes, nobody goes." Yet all of these statements are incorrect, for Lucky and Pozzo have arrived and have, in fact, caused a good deal to occur. After all, there is sufficient content in these parts for a play, indeed one of the most celebrated plays of the twentieth century.

This tension produces one of the great ironies and fascinations about the work. Lots of things are indeed happening, even if the characters do not perceive it, and the horror of their boredom provides an action endlessly analyzed by audiences. Thus even as the characters lament their fate, Beckett seems to put the responsibility on the artist and the audience to find significance in the seemingly empty scenes.

❝ Then adieu.
Adieu.
Adieu.
Adieu.
Silence. No one moves.
Adieu.
Adieu.
Adieu.
Silence.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

This tragicomic scene of failed goodbyes comes after Pozzo observes how badly Estrange and Vladimir smell. He says he must leave, but the characters seem somehow unable to part.

The exchange reiterates the lack of mobility and agency. But more specifically, it shows how an expressed wish to perform an action does not cause that action to take place. Pozzo conveys a motivation for leaving and goes through the necessary social code to depart, yet even after saying the right words he remains rooted to the ground. Indeed, the group tries twice to complete this simple social gesture, demonstrating that their entanglement in Lucky's metaphorical dance-net is so tight that they cannot correctly execute the most basic of interactions.

That "Adieu" translates to French literally as "to God" offers one potential explanation. If we take Godot as a metaphor or stand-in for God, then going toward God would actually imply staying stationary in order for Godot to appear. Furthermore, this interoperation would show how the logic of waiting and apathy have so deeply invaded the characters' minds that their very phrases fail to operate. The word "Adieu" itself has taken on a new meaning in a world where God is absent and constantly delayed.

Let's go.
We can't.
Why not?
We're waiting for Godot.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker), Godot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

After Pozzo and Lucky depart, Estragon immediately becomes bored once more and recommends that he and Vladimir leave as well. Vladimir reproaches him again, reminding the forgetful Estragon of their reason for staying in the same spot.

The lines reiterate the fickleness of Estragon's memory; his mind immediately resets after every interaction, as if each moment is the beginning to a new play. In this way, he is much like a child who cannot track the progress of time or link earlier events to previous ones. He lives purely and perpetually in the present. Before, we might have believed in Vladimir as a voice of authority through his ability to form narratives and recall events. But by now the pointlessness of waiting has begun to seep in. The audience begins to wonder whether Estragon is perhaps correct in wishing to abandon their quest of waiting, and whether an eternal present might actually be a better response to a world without meaning. Beckett, then, has set up a scenario to call into question our presumptions about who holds authority in a situation of desperation. He demands that we be more skeptical of those who promise a future spiritual salvation, though Beckett never offers a clear alternative.

We know them, I tell you. You forget everything. (Pause. To himself.) Unless they're not the same...
Why didn't they recognize us then?
That means nothing. I too pretended not to recognize them.
And then nobody every recognizes us.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker), Pozzo, Lucky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

After Lucky and Pozzo depart, Vladimir claims that he had known them before this interaction. When Estragon questions him, Vladimir begins to doubt his own memory and invents, instead, a justification about mutual mis-recognition.

It is intriguing that Estragon's doubt is able to infiltrate Vladimir's professed certainty. Whereas Vladimir's memory is generally contrasted with Estragon's complete inability to recall prior events, here Vladimir does not remain faithful to the point that "You forget everything." He mistrusts his own vision and mind for a moment. Without a memory to aid him in this process, Estragon relies on interpreting social codes—the act of mutual recognition—to try to understand the situation. He reasons that if they had indeed met each other before, someone would have said something. But when Vladimir rejects that strategy with a nihilistic "that means nothing," he denies this as a valid way to interpret reality. His justification is that all people feign mis-recognition even if they do indeed know each other.

A few different interpretations are possible here. Perhaps Vladimir is simply constructing a strange theory to justify his own uncertainty, much like how Pozzo would create theories on the distribution of happiness. Or perhaps Beckett is making a larger point on human behavior—ridiculing the ways we could recognize each other as humans more fully and yet constantly pretend not to identify this common quality between us all.

You don't know me?
No Sir.
It wasn't you came yesterday?
No Sir.
This is your first time?
Yes Sir.

Related Characters: Vladimir, Boy (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

When the Boy arrives bringing a message from Godot, Vladimir and Estragon interrogate him briefly. They question why he is so late and whether he has come before, establishing what will come to be a potentially cyclic pattern.

Vladimir's belief that the same Boy came yesterday reveals a similar uncertainty that he held with Lucky and Pozzo.

Able, unlike Estragon, to connect individual memories into larger narratives, Vladimir believes that the events of the play are repeating themselves—and that the same characters resurface again and again as a result. If true, this would define a structure of meaning for Vladimir beyond "Nothing to be done," for he could interpret patterns and see the Boy as a prior acquaintance.

Yet the Boy refuses to affirm this wish. Instead he plays the childlike role of Estragon that situates their interaction in the eternal present. In doing so, he casts the information he will tell about Godot as novel and important, whereas a cyclical model would imply that it has been said again and again. The entire merit of waiting for Godot seems to rest, then, on Vladimir's now undermined ability to trust his memory.

> Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow.

Related Characters: Boy (speaker), Godot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

After the interrogation from Vladimir and Estragon, the Boy finally gives his message. But that memo does not convey much real meaning, and rather serves to revert the characters to their bored state of waiting.

This rhetoric of expected arrival further casts Godot as a religious symbol. Though he is presumed to offer some kind of eternal salvation for the characters, his presence is constantly delayed and merely promised by others. At this point in the play, the emptiness of these words is not quite clear, for the Boy has only appeared once. But already Vladimir's comments on how events and people seem to be repeating themselves indicate that the Boy may have said these words before. That is to say, perhaps the lengthy, nihilism-induced wait for Godot has been caused by a series of forgotten "but surely tomorrow"s.

> Tell him... *(he hesitates)*... tell him you saw us. *(Pause.)* You did see us, didn't you?

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker), Godot, Boy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

As the Boy leaves, Vladimir makes this desperate appeal to human recognition. He first asks the Boy to represent them to Godot, but more simply just asks to have been seen.

Recognition is, by now, one of Vladimir's fixations. He has repeatedly claimed to recall and identify other characters, but they refuse to affirm him in return. And, as a result, Vladimir has begun to doubt his own mental capacities. Thus for the boy to see them and tell Godot about them would signal far more than just conveying simple information. For Vladimir, it would imply that they have been remembered—and that they are significant and meaningful human beings. Beneath this appeal also lies a deep skepticism in even the most simple of human processes: vision. Considering the twilight setting and the motif of blindness in the second act, Vladimir becomes concerned that his existential worries are perhaps the result of the most simple misrecognition: an inability to even see other people.

> Christ! What has Christ got to do with it. You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker), Estragon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Estragon is prompted to compare himself to Christ because he too lacks shoes. Yet Vladimir is outraged at the trivial analogy, harshly reprimanding Estragon for making a religious allusion.

This moment builds on a dynamic in Estragon and Vladimir's relationship, in which the first will make a naive but honest comment and the second will find it flawed for some social or conceptual reason. Here, Vladimir is outraged because Estragon has inappropriately applied a traditional, spiritual narrative to their meaningless and empty lives. It's intriguing that the martyr comparison—one that many make in times of desperation—is deemed so unacceptable, especially considering the clear parallels between Godot and God as messianic forces of salvation. Vladimir directly

challenges both Estragon and the audience on that type of one-to-one allegory. He demands that we think more broadly about what type of salvation Godot could possibly bring. Alternatively, we might argue that Beckett has set the play in a spiritually vacant realm, in which any comparison to Christ is deemed ridiculous by the characters, even if their actions are mirroring those of religious adherents. They may be denying the efficacy of religion, but they are desperate for its salvation all the same.

Well, shall we go?
Yes, let's go.
They do not move.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

These final lines of the first act come after Estragon and Vladimir debate separating, decide not to, and then propose to move on together. But instead of actually departing, they just verbally suggest it and remain immobile.

Once more, this exchange shows the depth of the stagnancy of the characters. They start with the most radical proposal—to separate—then reduce it to moving together, and yet they cannot even accomplish that. As with the "Adieu" sequence, the two perform the requisite speech acts of "Yes, let's go," but they cannot transfer language into action. Indeed, this distinction is one of the key themes in Beckett's works, for action certainly lies within language for the audience, and at times for the characters when they are able to make conversation. But at other times, language is shown to directly contrast with action, when it functions as a delay mechanism or explicitly fails to perform its proper purpose.

The placement of these lines just at the end of the first act returns us to the play's beginning. Nothing was to be done, we were told, and here we see, indeed, nothing being done. Beckett, however, stresses not the necessary nihilism of the play, but rather the specific lack of agency or energy in each of the characters. Nothing can be done here because no one causes anything to be done, even when they might wish it to be different.

Act 2 Quotes

Say, I am happy.
I am happy.
So am I.
So am I.
We are happy.
We are happy. (Silence.) What do we do now, now that we are happy?
Wait for Godot.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

As act two begins, Vladimir and Estragon seem to undergo a radical emotional shift. With no real pretense, both claim to be happy, yet when they wonder what to do with this new good mood, they can come up with no suggestion besides waiting once more for Godot.

The way the two profess their happiness merits some skepticism. After all, no events have transpired to change their lives from the previous day. And rather than offer any rational basis for being in a good mood, the two will themselves into the state by verbally exclaiming its existence. Vladimir commands Estragon not to be happy but to "say" that he is happy, and this indicates that the next series of comments might be untruthful speech acts instead of honest descriptions of their mental states. The sing-song rhythm created by the repeated phrases also casts it more as a ritual than an earnest expression—and makes the entire endeavor seem cynical.

That this supposed happiness will not do anything to change the men's actual actions speaks to the division between language and behavior that pervades this play. Though Vladimir and Estragon claim to have acquired a new disposition, they are no more active than before. Thus happiness is not taken as a way to fight back against boredom and nihilism, but rather as a temporary, even false, distraction.

The best thing would be to kill me, like the other.
What other? (Pause.) What other?
Like billions of others.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

Estragon makes this allusion to human suffering after suggesting that he and Vladimir part ways. Vladimir points out that Estragon often makes similar grandiose statements without ever following through, which causes Estragon to take the more radical position that he should die.

Beneath this seemingly insensible statement lie a serious of complex references to other parts in the play. Estragon's suggestion that death would be preferable to the dullness of their interaction recalls the earlier suggestion that they hang themselves to relieve boredom. But "the other" more likely refers to Lucky, for Pozzo had suggested killing him in order to be relieved of the burden. Thus while Estragon may not explicitly remember the events of the day before, they seem to have infiltrated his subconscious, causing him to see his relationship with Vladimir as analogous to that of Lucky and Pozzo. Vladimir is notably uncomfortable here, repeating the same question with a pause in the middle. Perhaps he is concerned about Estragon's sanity, or perhaps he recognizes the reference to Lucky—and is horrified at the implicit comparison of himself to Pozzo.

The reference to "billions of others," however, displaces that one-to-one connection to Lucky. Instead of focusing on a single human story, Estragon justifies his own killing based on the deaths of other humans. In a sense, the phrase is grandiose and frightening, but also slightly ridiculous—for billions have not been killed for the reason of "the best thing." But it also shows the extent of the nihilism pervading the play. Perhaps billions have indeed died, or at least Estragon feels their deaths would be reasonable considering the hopelessness of his world.

> It must be the Spring.
> But in a single night!
> I tell you we weren't here yesterday. Another of your nightmares.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Estragon and Vladimir try to make sense of their environment's first real change: The tree has grown leaves. For Estragon, this is proof that their life is not repeating, whereas Vladimir wonders whether the seasons have shifted in a day.

This passage presents two models of time and implies that each model bestows a different type of significance on the characters. Vladimir relies on his memory that they were in the same place the night before and that the tree had no leaves—but now the tree has leaves, so spring must have arrived in a single night. He takes two perceptual pieces of information, believes in their connection, and arrives at a daring conclusion. Estragon, on the other hand, lacks a memory and therefore presumes that spring could not have come so rapidly. He takes the logical end result and extrapolates backwards to assume that Vladimir's information must be the result only of "nightmares."

Thus we have two different options for the reality of the play: Either we accept that the normal logic of the seasons is perverted, but concede that Vladimir's perceptions are generally correct, or we deny his claims as mere nightmare and affirm the eternal present as experienced by Estragon. This passage serves to further undermine Vladimir's authority in the relationship and to show how fickle our adherence can be to time models: They can be abandoned with the sight of one blooming tree.

> We came too soon.
> It's always at nightfall.
> But night doesn't fall.
> It'll fall all of a sudden, like yesterday.
> Then it'll be night.
> And we can go.
> Then it'll be day again.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

After Estragon once more suggests leaving, Vladimir must remind him that they have not moved in order to wait for Godot. This disagreement causes them to reflect on the specific way time is repeating.

Estragon's position can be summarized, here, as rejecting the linear development of time toward an expected goal: the

arrival of Godot. He denies that they have arrived at the right moment, then rejects the imminent arrival of that correct moment: when night will fall. What Estragon is taking issue with here is not exactly time as such, but rather the progressive motion between different moments in time. Rejecting the dynamic process of night falling, he instead repeats the model of the eternal present in which it is night at one moment, day in another. Nothing, in this account, would ever occur that would allow them to "go."

Vladimir, on the other hand, defends the potential for change to take place if they continue waiting for Godot. From his certainty in the way twilight fell yesterday, he extrapolates that a similar change will take place—and that another change will allow them to be finally mobile and "go" once Godot arrives. In this way, Beckett seems to present faith (in Godot or in any sort of redemption) as an indicator of one's specific belief in time: the anticipation of future events based on past ones is deemed necessary to belief in or hope for a savior.

> No, the best would be to take advantage of Pozzo's calling for help.

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker), Pozzo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

When Pozzo and Lucky return, their relationship both to each other and to Estragon and Vladimir has changed dramatically. Now blind, Pozzo has lost his position of power, which invites Vladimir to make this cruel comment on taking advantage of his disability.

The switch from his earlier comments of pathos to this suggestion is remarkable. Without his vision, Pozzo is now in a weaker state and entirely dependent on Lucky. But instead of expressing sympathy as he had in the first act, Vladimir becomes opportunistic, wondering how to maximize the fact that Pozzo cannot put up any kind of fight. One brutal interpretation would be that Vladimir's previous empathy for both Lucky and Pozzo was only a factor of their relative power in the interaction—and thus that it was motivated more by calculated social conditions rather than authentic emotion. This would be a very dark view of humanity as entirely opportunist and self-motivated, but it fits with the established selfishness shown thus far.

> Suppose we got up to begin with?
> No harm trying.

They get up.

Child's play.

Simple question of will-power.

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

Pozzo, Vladimir, and Estragon have all by now fallen on the floor and seem unable to rise. Yet after waiting for a bit and expressing a new wave of boredom, they suddenly stand up, self-congratulate, and render it an act of will.

These lines are quite humorous, for their simplicity directly contrasts with the earlier empty discussion about standing up. Whereas before words could not translate into action, here action takes place when there is a void of words. The characters may consider this an act of "will-power," but it seems far more to be a factor of them having had no other task. After all, that standing is considered "child's play" only serves to reiterate the ridiculousness of their previous immobility. It is deeply infantile, the act of a child, to be so obstinately apathetic—but it is also a reality of their world. Are we to take "will-power" then as earnest or ironic? Certainly, we laugh at the way these characters use the phrase, but Beckett also seems honestly invested in the value of the will. Instead of waiting, the three have actually accomplished something minuscule by standing up, seeming to indicate that a set of similar actions could potentially produce some personal benefit.

> Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?

Related Characters: Pozzo (speaker), Estragon, Vladimir, Lucky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

As Lucky and Pozzo prepare to leave, Vladimir requests a

second performance of singing or recitation from Lucky. Pozzo responds that he is mute and, after Vladimir protests, he makes this final outburst against Vladimir's insistence on tracking the progression of time.

Pozzo finally vocalizes what Estragon has hinted at and what the audience may have been skeptical about for some time: that Vladimir's insistence on linking past events to present ones is ultimately unhelpful. Time, for Pozzo, is deemed inherently "accursed" and "abominable" simply because it forces him to reflect on previous experiences and compare them to current reality. Perhaps he finds this particularly agonizing because he wishes for a time when he could see and Lucky could speak, sing, and think. Pozzo quickly extrapolates from his individual dynamic, however, into a broader theory. He zooms out from "I went blind" to "we'll go deaf," thus including all the characters in his fate. Then he zooms out further to describe with a flippant tone how all are born and die on "one day."

This idea is a form of the eternal present similar to that experienced by Estragon. By this model, it does not matter which events occurred at which time, but simply that they take place eventually and at some point in history. Yet Pozzo's argument is even more radical in a way. For he puns on "one" to mean both a specific day and an identical day for many people—which would imply that all are born and all die in "the same second." Of course, he does not mean this literally, but rather uses it to contextualize the relative brevity of human life as a mere second in history—and as ultimately so meaningless that trying to form a time scale and narrative like Vladimir's is pointless.

> Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now?

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in the play, Vladimir's self-confidence has been deeply shaken. He no longer knows whether to rely on his own perceptions of time and reality and considers with deep skepticism whether he is even awake.

That skepticism is presented in two stages: First, Vladimir questions his memories, wondering if what he presumed to be reality was in fact a dream. This is familiar territory for the play, but the second question more radically calls into question his present mental state. Not only memories, but also present perception, can be warped to such an extent that Vladimir loses the stable foundation from which to comment on their significance.

The allusion to suffering presents misperception as more than a matter of self-delusion. It has specific consequences for the "others," perhaps the billions of others to which Estragon referred, whom Vladimir ignores while sleeping. Beckett seems to be refer to a mode of denial, in which perpetrators and witnesses ignore the suffering of others and live in an alternative and self-constructed reality.

> Tell him... (he hesitates)... tell him you saw me and that... (he hesitates)... that you saw me. (Pause. Vladimir advances, the Boy recoils. Vladimir halts, the Boy halts. With sudden violence.) You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!

Related Characters: Vladimir (speaker), Pozzo, Boy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

As the Boy departs again, having promised that Godot will come the next day, Vladimir grows increasingly desperate. He insists that the Boy inform Godot of their interaction and once more appeals to the idea that the Boy has recognized him.

These lines replay the interaction between Vladimir and the Boy that transpired in the first act. Except here, Vladimir's tone and stage directions are marked by uncertainty and rashness. Twice, "he hesitates," unsure whether to say the same lines he knows he is repeating. And it is presumably his horror at having become repetitive that causes him to react with such anger to the Boy. Vladimir's frustration, then, is directed both externally and internally: both toward those who seem to be duping him into believing these events have not already transpired, and toward himself for potentially believing too much in his conviction that they have.

What was before a question to the Boy—"You did see us, didn't you?" thus becomes a demand. Beckett demonstrates how the environment of the play, in which characters negate Vladimir's memory and sense perceptions, could very well cause someone to grow irrational. His character becomes a

case study on the value of remembering, for his insistence brings nothing but vexation.

> Well? Shall we go?
> Yes, let's go.
> *They do not move.*

Related Characters: Estragon, Vladimir (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

These are the final lines of the play. Vladimir suggests they depart and Estragon affirms the choice, but the two remain just as immobile as ever.

By finishing the work here, Beckett returns the action back to two earlier moments in the text: The first is an almost identical set of lines at the end of act one. The second is the opening sequence in which it was immediately established that nothing was to be done. This invites a first reading that the text moves nowhere and serves to argue that the characters will wait in boredom and nihilism forever. Yet a few key changes from act one should be noted.

Whereas at the end of act one, Estragon was the first to suggest leaving, at the end of act two, it is Vladimir who first says, "Well? Shall we go?" Beckett also breaks up the line "Well, shall we go?" into two separate questions. Vladimir's sentences thus seems more pointed—less a casual expression reached from boredom and more an explicit wish to change. And, indeed, this decision is significant coming from his character, for Vladimir has previously demanded the two must remain still to wait for Godot. Perhaps the skepticism he has expressed at the mission of waiting for Godot has finally led Vladimir to abandon the quest—which may give rise to increased agency and movement.

The final stage direction, however, undermines any such idea. Even, it seems, if the two wish to depart, they remain caught in the game of language over action, of expressing a desire without actually bringing it to fruition. Beckett ends the text on an appropriately divisive note: the stagnancy is devoid of meaning for the characters, but within that stagnancy lies a world of meaning for the audience.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

Sitting on the side of a country road by a tree, Estragon tries repeatedly to pull off one of his boots. Vladimir enters and Estragon exasperatedly tells him there's "nothing to be done." Vladimir agrees and asks Estragon where he spent the last night. Estragon says he slept in a ditch.

The general statement, "nothing to be done," can refer to Estragon's inability to pull off his boot, waiting for Godot, or the characters' lives in general—even the human condition itself.

Vladimir asks if "they" beat Estragon while he was sleeping there and he says that they did. Vladimir says, "It's too much for one man," but then reasons that there's no point in giving up now. Estragon tells Vladimir to stop talking and help him get his boot off. Vladimir asks if the boot hurts, and Estragon balks at the question. Vladimir reminds him that he's not the only one who suffers, and points out to Estragon that his fly is unbuttoned.

The beginning of the play introduces the audience to the characters' bleak world, which is filled with all kinds of suffering, from the more trivial (a boot that is stuck on) to the more serious (an anonymous "they" who beat Estragon mercilessly). Beckett mixes this suffering with abrupt humor, here in the form of Estragon's unbuttoned fly.

Estragon again asks for help, but Vladimir ignores him, taking off his hat, looking in it, and shaking it upside down, as if hoping for something to fall out. Nothing does, and he says, "nothing to be done." Estragon finally gets his boot off and then looks inside it and shakes it upside down, apparently also hoping to find something inside it. Vladimir says, "show me," but Estragon tells him there's nothing to see.

The characters' absurd behavior (looking inside their hats and boots) is never explained. Vladimir ignores Estragon's pain, and repeats Estragon's assertion that there is nothing to be done: they are not only bored, but crippled by their inability to do anything at all.

Vladimir wonders what would happen if he and Estragon repented. Estragon asks what they would be repenting for and Vladimir doesn't say. Estragon suggests repenting being born, which makes Vladimir laugh. Estragon tells him not to laugh, and instead only to smile.

The Christian idea of repentance no longer has any real value for Vladimir and Estragon. Estragon's comment underscores the uneasy quality of the play's humor. Should the audience heed his warning too, or is it okay for us to laugh?

Vladimir asks if Estragon has ever read the Bible and if he remembers the Gospels. Estragon remembers only colored maps of the holy land. As Estragon describes the colorful maps, Vladimir jokes that he should have been a poet. Estragon says he was one. Vladimir asks how Estragon's foot is doing. It's swollen.

In somewhat typical Postmodern fashion, Estragon's stance toward Biblical tradition is devoid of any reverence or specialness. It is unclear whether Estragon's absurdly abrupt statement that he was a poet is to be taken seriously or not.

Vladimir tells Estragon about the two thieves crucified alongside Jesus in the Bible. One of the two thieves was damned to hell, while the other was saved. "Saved from what?" asks Estragon. Vladimir says from hell. Vladimir wonders why only one of the four Evangelists writes of the one thief being saved. Estragon is bored by the conversation.

The Biblical story introduces the idea of salvation into the play. But in the Modern-Postmodern world of the play there is no God by whom the characters hope to be saved—only Godot. Estragon, meanwhile, is bored even by his friend's conversation.

Vladimir continues to wonder about the two thieves, and whether one was saved or not. Estragon doesn't follow Vladimir's thinking and is confused. Vladimir asks why they should believe the one Evangelist who says a thief was saved, when the other three disagree. Estragon asks who believes that one of the thieves was saved and Vladimir says that everybody does. Estragon says people are "bloody ignorant apes."

Vladimir is skeptical of the Bible and points out its self-contradictions. Estragon's comment shows the bleak status of humanity in the play. While he nonchalantly compares humans to apes, Vladimir will be greatly pained throughout the play by his lack of dignity.

While Estragon gets up and looks around, Vladimir looks in Estragon's boot but doesn't find anything. Estragon suggests they go somewhere, but Vladimir tells him they can't, because they are waiting for someone named Godot. Estragon asks if Vladimir is sure that they are in the right place, and Vladimir says that it must be, because of the tree at the side of the road.

Estragon will ask this question repeatedly over the course of the play, due to his absurd lack of memory. The promise of some kind of help from Godot is actually an insidious form of control and entrapment, as it forces Vladimir and Estragon to stay put, waiting indefinitely.

Estragon asks where the tree's leaves are and Vladimir says it must be dead, or else it's not the right season for leaves. The two agree that the tree is more like a bush or shrub. Vladimir doubts whether Godot will really come. Estragon asks what they will do if he doesn't come, and Vladimir says they'll come back to the same place the next day, and the next day, and so on, until Godot arrives.

Vladimir and Estragon absurdly deny that the tree on-stage is really a tree. Vladimir's plan to wait for Godot indefinitely shows how he and Estragon are trapped here in a kind of prison of their own making: they are free to leave but kept here by their hope for Godot's arrival.

Estragon says they came to this place yesterday, but Vladimir disagrees. Estragon asks if Vladimir is sure that they are at this spot on the right day. Vladimir thinks so (it is Saturday), but looks through his pockets to see if he wrote down somewhere on which day they were supposed to come. Estragon doubts what day it is and worries that maybe Godot came yesterday and they weren't there to meet him.

Unlike Vladimir, who has a somewhat stable sense of time, Estragon is completely temporally disoriented, and has no idea what day it is, let alone a sense of what he and Vladimir did yesterday.

The two take a break from talking and Estragon falls asleep. Vladimir wakes him and Estragon asks why he won't let him sleep. Vladimir says he was lonely. Estragon says he had a dream and begins to tell Vladimir about it, but Vladimir angrily shouts at him not to describe the dream. He tells Estragon to keep his nightmares private.

Vladimir has an intense fear of loneliness. He feels painfully alone even when Estragon simply stops talking to him and falls asleep.

Estragon wonders if it would be better for he and Vladimir to go their separate ways. He is reminded of a joke about an Englishman at a brothel that he tells to Vladimir, who stops him in the middle of the joke and leaves the stage. Vladimir returns and Estragon asks if he has something to tell him. Vladimir says he has nothing to say.

Estragon's unfinished joke and Vladimir's having nothing to say to Estragon lend an absurd tone to the scene. Vladimir says he has nothing to say, but just saying this proves that he did, in fact, have something to say.

Estragon apologizes and the two embrace. Estragon jumps back, though, because Vladimir reeks of garlic. Vladimir asks what they should do now. Estragon suggests they wait. Vladimir asks what they will do while they wait and Estragon suggests they hang themselves. They go over to the tree, but neither wants to be hanged first.

Estragon's jumping back from the garlic smell of Vladimir undercuts their tender embrace with abrupt humor. Estragon's nonchalant suggestion of suicide is uneasily absurd and uncomfortable for the audience, as it is both comical and deeply troubling.

Estragon says Vladimir should hang himself first because he is heavier. If Estragon hanged himself first, and then Vladimir tried but the branch broke under his weight, Vladimir would be all alone. Vladimir asks if he is really heavier than Estragon and then asks, "Well? What do we do?" Estragon says it's safer to do nothing at all. Vladimir suggests they wait and see what Godot says.

The characters' calm consideration of the details of how they might hang themselves continues the eerily absurd quality of the play. In the end, though, they decide simply to keep on waiting, doing nothing at all.

Vladimir says he is interested to hear what Godot will offer them. Estragon asks what they asked Godot for and Vladimir says nothing very specific; it was just a vague sort of prayer. Estragon asks what Godot's reply to the prayer was and Vladimir reminds him that Godot said he would wait and see. Estragon remembers and adds that Godot said he couldn't promise anything.

The promise of some kind of salvation through Godot is anything but certain. Not only are Vladimir and Estragon not sure that Godot will come, but they don't even know if he would really help them if he did. Nonetheless, they keep waiting for him.

Estragon asks, "Where do we come in?" and Vladimir is confused at first, then responds, "on our hands and knees." Estragon asks if they don't have rights any longer and Vladimir tells him they got rid of them. Suddenly, Vladimir tells Estragon to listen, as if he hears something. The two listen, but neither actually hears anything. They sigh in relief.

Vladimir's comment that they would approach Godot on their hands and knees might suggest a parallel between Godot and God. However, this subservient posture might also suggest that Godot is not some kind of savior, but merely a new, oppressive master.

Vladimir says he thought he had heard Godot. Estragon says he's hungry and Vladimir offers him a carrot, but then all he can find in his pockets are turnips. At last, he finds a carrot and gives it to Estragon, who excitedly eats it.

Estragon is desperate for food. Vladimir's confusion over whether he has a carrot or not adds some humorous levity to the characters' suffering.

Estragon asks Vladimir if they are "tied." Vladimir asks what he means and Estragon asks if they are tied to Godot. Vladimir says they are, at least for the moment. Estragon asks if they are sure that this person is named Godot, and Vladimir says he thinks so. Estragon finishes his carrot and says again, "nothing to be done."

Waiting for Godot has become such an obligation that Vladimir and Estragon are "tied" to him, trapped though apparently free to leave. Estragon repeats his earlier assertion of boredom and nihilism: there is nothing for them to do, and perhaps there is really nothing ever to be done.

The two are interrupted by a horrible scream off-stage. They run to the edge of the stage. Estragon stops and runs back to get his boot, then runs back to Vladimir. They huddle together, frightened by the noise.

In the face of their fear and suffering, Vladimir and Estragon huddle together. They are each other's only companions.

Pozzo and Lucky enter. Pozzo drives lucky like an animal with a rope around his neck. He carries a whip to drive him along, while Lucky carries a folding stool, a bag, a picnic basket, and a coat. Pozzo whips Lucky as they pass across the stage and just as they are leaving the stage, he stops Lucky suddenly, causing him to drop all his things. Vladimir goes to help Lucky, but Estragon stops him. Pozzo tells the two of them to be careful, as Lucky is dangerous.

Pozzo's horrible treatment of Lucky and Lucky's physical suffering are, at the same time, tragic and (with Lucky's slapstick clumsiness) somewhat comical. The audience or reader is unsure whether to laugh or cringe.

Estragon asks Vladimir if this is Godot, but then Pozzo introduces himself by name and asks if they are not familiar with him. Estragon mishears him and ponders out loud if he knows a Bozzo. Pozzo angrily corrects him. Estragon apologizes, saying they are not from here, but Pozzo says, "you are human beings none the less," and ironically says they are all made in God's image.

Pozzo's ironic reference to the Bible emphasizes the undignified position of suffering humans in this environment. The mix-ups with Pozzo's identity and name further the sense of unstable identities in the play.

Pozzo asks who Godot is. Vladimir says he's an acquaintance, but Estragon says they hardly know him. Pozzo asks if they were waiting for Godot here, on his land, but then he admits that the road is free land. He changes the conversation and jerks the rope that is tied around Lucky's neck, calling him "pig." He continues to pull Lucky around by the rope around his neck, then asks Lucky for his coat.

Pozzo's treatment of Lucky, whom he simply calls "pig," is the most blunt and obvious form of dehumanizing suffering that Beckett displays on-stage. And Estragon and Vladimir, for now at least, seem not at all interested in trying to help Lucky.

Pozzo asks Lucky for his stool, which Lucky places on the ground for Pozzo to sit on. He orders Lucky around some more, ordering him to bring his basket, from which he takes out a piece of chicken and a bottle of wine. He eats and drinks, as Vladimir and Estragon inspect Lucky, who is exhaustedly falling asleep as he stands.

Pozzo continues to maltreat Lucky as his slave. Vladimir and Estragon inspect Lucky, but more out of curiosity than empathy or pity for his suffering.

Vladimir and Estragon continue to examine Lucky, noticing how the rope chafes his neck and how tired he looks. They examine Lucky's appearance, with eyes "goggling out of his head." Vladimir suggests they ask Lucky a question and Estragon begins to speak to him, when Pozzo stops them, telling them to leave Lucky alone. He calls for his basket again and when Lucky doesn't move, Pozzo yanks the rope again. Lucky takes the bottle of wine and puts it back in the basket.

Again, Vladimir and Estragon observe Lucky's suffering, but don't seem to sympathize with his pain. Their indifference to his suffering allows Pozzo to continue to treat him so horribly.

Estragon looks at the chicken bones that Pozzo has thrown on the ground and tentatively asks if he can have them. Pozzo says he doesn't need the bones, but that they should go to Lucky, so Estragon should ask Lucky if he can have them. Estragon asks and Lucky doesn't reply. Pozzo yells at Lucky to answer, but when he says nothing Pozzo tells Estragon the bones are his.

Estragon stoops so low as to beg for the leftover bones of Pozzo's meal, displaying both how his suffering has robbed him of his dignity and how insensitive Pozzo is to the suffering of others. He could have offered some actual food to the nearly starving Estragon, after all.

Vladimir suddenly shouts out, "It's a scandal!" Pozzo asks what he is talking about, and Vladimir says that it is a scandal to treat Lucky in such a way. Pozzo asks how old Vladimir is (he does not respond) and then says he must be leaving. He thanks Vladimir and Estragon for their company. But then he debates smoking some more from his pipe before he leaves.

Vladimir finally protests against Pozzo's treatment of Lucky, but doesn't actually do anything about it. The ease with which Pozzo moves on in the conversation after Vladimir's accusatory outburst is uncomfortably absurd.

Vladimir tells Estragon they should leave, but Pozzo stops them. He yanks Lucky's rope again and has him move the stool. He sits back down and refills his pipe. Vladimir wants to leave, but Pozzo tells him, "wait a little longer, you'll never regret it," and Estragon admits they are "in no hurry."

Estragon's humorous comment that he and Vladimir are "in no hurry," encapsulates their predicament. They will keep waiting "a little longer," for quite a long time.

Vladimir still wants to go, and Pozzo tells him to think carefully, asking what would happen if Vladimir missed his "appointment" with Godot. Pozzo says he would like to meet Godot as well, since, as he says, "the more people I meet the happier I become." Estragon asks Pozzo why Lucky doesn't put down his bags and Vladimir encourages Estragon to ask Lucky himself. Lucky doesn't reply, but Pozzo says he will tell them.

Pozzo is perhaps also lonely, eager to encounter new people. Vladimir wants to leave, but feels obligated to stay and wait for Godot (though no one is forcing him to).

Pozzo prepares to speak and makes sure everyone is listening (jerking the rope around Lucky's neck to make him pay attention). He pauses to think and then asks what the question was. Estragon and Vladimir remind him. Pozzo says that Lucky has the right to "make himself comfortable," so the only reason why he doesn't must be that he doesn't want to. He says Lucky doesn't want to, because he wants to impress Pozzo, so that Pozzo will "keep him."

Pozzo makes everyone pay attention but then comically forgets what he was going to say. Pozzo's explanation for why Lucky endures such horrible treatment is absurd, yet it is reminiscent of arguments made by other slaveholders. For instance, Southern slave owners often argued that their slaves were better off for being slaves, or pointed to slave songs as indications of their slaves being happy as slaves.

Vladimir and Estragon are confused, wondering why Pozzo would get rid of Lucky. Pozzo repeats that Lucky wants to show how well he carries things so that Pozzo will keep him. But, Pozzo says, Lucky actually carries things "like a pig." He says that he has plenty of slaves and cries out, "Atlas, son of Jupiter!"

Pozzo inverts the entire logic of slavery, asserting that Lucky acts like a slave because he wants to be Pozzo's slave, which seems ludicrous. Atlas is not the son of Jupiter, suggesting that the knowledge and authority Pozzo projects are based on false premises.

Vladimir again asks if Pozzo wants to get rid of Lucky. Pozzo says he is on his way to the fair to sell Lucky, but that it would be better just to kill him. Lucky begins to weep, and Pozzo says, "old dogs have more dignity." Pozzo gives his handkerchief to Estragon and tells him to wipe away Lucky's tears. Estragon hesitates, so Vladimir says he'll do it. The two fight over the handkerchief.

Pozzo cruelly comments on Lucky's lack of dignity, caused by his suffering at Pozzo's own hands. Vladimir and Estragon absurdly fight over the right to wipe away Lucky's tears—it is never explained why either of them should care who does this.

Estragon walks up to Lucky with the handkerchief, but Lucky kicks him in the shins. Pozzo shouts for the handkerchief, which Lucky picks up and returns to him. Meanwhile, Estragon's leg is bleeding, and he cries out that he can hardly walk. Vladimir says he'll carry Estragon, "if necessary." Pozzo notes that Lucky has stopped crying and jokes that Estragon has replaced Lucky. "The tears of the world are a constant quantity," he says.

Should we see Lucky's kicking Estragon as some light slapstick comedy or as a continuation of the haunting world of suffering that pervades the play? As is typical of Beckett's dark humor, the answer is a mix of both. Pozzo sees the suffering of the world as a constant, unavoidable fact (though this may also just justify his own role in inflicting abuse on others that might create tears).

Pozzo says that "our generation" is no unhappier than any previous one and says that Lucky taught him that. He says that he took Lucky as a slave 60 years ago and Vladimir is astonished that he would turn away "such an old and faithful servant." Vladimir says that Pozzo is throwing Lucky away "like a banana skin."

Pozzo characterizes the unspecified time of the play as no unhappier than any other time. This can be taken optimistically (the present time is just as happy as any other) or more pessimistically (all other times have been as bleak as this one). Vladimir is again upset by Lucky's suffering.

Pozzo mumbles that he "can't bear it" with Lucky and that he is going crazy. Vladimir and Estragon repeat his words, and then Vladimir turns to Lucky accusingly, telling him his behavior is "abominable" toward "such a good master." Pozzo begins to cry, saying that Lucky "used to be so kind...so helpful...and entertaining." Vladimir and Estragon wonder whether Lucky wants a new slave to take his place or not.

Pozzo imposes suffering on Lucky but presents himself as the victim of his own slave's change in behavior. Vladimir abruptly shifts from scolding Pozzo to chastising Lucky, suggesting that Vladimir dislikes abuse but doesn't actually have the ability to separate real abuse from false. This is not to say that Pozzo is faking his sadness, but rather that his sadness is, on some fundamental level, illegitimate.

Pozzo collects himself and says there wasn't "a word of truth" in what he just said. "Do I look like a man that can be made to suffer?" he asks. Vladimir and Estragon comment on how "charming" and "unforgettable" their evening has been. Pozzo tries to find his pipe, which he has misplaced, while Vladimir leaves the stage momentarily.

Pozzo shifts emotions with comic abruptness. His rhetorical question is meant to imply that he cannot be made to suffer, but clearly (as we have just seen) he can.

Pozzo is distraught at having lost his pipe and begins to ask Vladimir if he has seen it, before he notices that Vladimir has left without saying goodbye. Estragon tells Pozzo to get up and look at something. He points off in the distance and says, "it's all over." Vladimir returns, angry, and kicks over Pozzo's stool. He calms down and asks, "will night never come?"

Estragon's vague comment of despair ("it's all over,") is all the more bleak for how vague it is: it could apply to anything, from Estragon's hopes for a better life to all of human history. Vladimir is beginning to get angry from waiting all day for Godot.

Pozzo says he understands and that he wouldn't want to leave before nightfall either if he were waiting for Godot. He says he'd like to sit down on his stool again, but doesn't know how. Estragon offers to help and Pozzo tells him to ask him to sit down. Estragon asks Pozzo to sit down and he does.

Pozzo's inability to sit down unless asked to is absurd and humorous, but is also another example of characters constrained by seemingly nothing, but constrained nonetheless.

Pozzo says he must be going, because of his schedule, though Vladimir says, "time has stopped." Pozzo disagrees, then says he will tell Vladimir and Estragon about twilight. He prepares to speak and asks for everyone's attention. He cracks his whip to get Lucky's attention then throws down the whip, saying it is worn out. Pozzo forgets what he was going to talk about.

Vladimir's comment that time has stopped characterizes the repetitive, recursive way time functions in the play. Pozzo again calls for everyone's attention and then comically forgets what he wanted to say.

Vladimir again suggests he and Estragon leave. Pozzo asks Estragon what his name is, and Estragon says it is Adam. Pozzo remembers that he wanted to talk about the night. He tells everyone to look up at the sky and describes its shifting colors lyrically. Then, he describes how night "burst[s] upon us," saying, "that's how it is on this bitch of an earth."

Whether Estragon is playing with Pozzo or actually thinks his name is Adam, his reply to Pozzo suggests the instability of individuals' identities in the play. Adam, of course, is also the name of the Biblical first man in Eden, a condition that is almost the opposite of Estragon's.

Vladimir says that he and Estragon can simply bide their time and wait. He says they are used to it. Pozzo asks them what they thought of his speech: "Good? Middling? Poor? Positively bad?" They compliment his speaking. Estragon and Vladimir describe their boredom, waiting while "nothing happens."

Pozzo's asking for feedback on his speech is somewhat silly and humorous. After the momentary distraction of some conversation, Vladimir and Estragon are again bored, returning again to the conclusion that "nothing happens."

Pozzo says that since Vladimir and Estragon have been civil to him, he wonders if there is anything he can do to help them, since they are "having such a dull, dull time." Estragon asks for money, though Vladimir is offended and says they are not beggars. Pozzo concludes that he has done enough just by talking to Vladimir and Estragon for some time.

Estragon has no shame in asking for money, whereas Vladimir sees this as beneath their dignity. Pozzo's self-satisfied conclusion that he has given them the gift of his speaking is absurd, but to some degree true—he has distracted them from their "dull, dull" waiting.

Pozzo pulls on Lucky's rope, picks up the whip, and asks whether Estragon and Vladimir want Lucky to dance, sing, recite, or think. He says that Lucky can think out loud for hours. Estragon says he'd rather see Lucky dance, but Vladimir wants to hear Lucky think. Estragon suggests they have Lucky dance first, and then think. Pozzo says Lucky only refused to dance once.

Vladimir is apparently no longer troubled by Lucky's suffering, as he is eager to be entertained by his dancing and thinking. The idea of Lucky thinking on command for entertainment is particularly odd and absurd, though Estragon and Vladimir treat it as perfectly ordinary.

Lucky dances. Pozzo says Lucky used to be able to dance better. He asks if Estragon and Vladimir know what Lucky's dance is called. Estragon guesses "The Scapegoat's Agony," while Vladimir guesses "The Hard Stool." Pozzo says the dance is called "The Net," because Lucky thinks he's entangled in a net.

Estragon's guess at the dance's name points to Lucky's status as a scapegoat, the person on whom Pozzo takes out his own unhappiness. Vladimir's guess is a crude pun. Pozzo's suggests the pervasive sense of entrapment that all the characters feel.

Estragon asks about the time Lucky refused to dance. Pozzo prepares to speak, then forgets what he was going to say. Estragon and Vladimir try to remember, as well. Estragon thinks maybe he was going to say why Lucky doesn't put down his bags. Vladimir says Pozzo already answered that question. In any case, Vladimir notes that Lucky has put his bags down in order to dance.

All three characters are comically unable to remember what they were just talking about. It is this kind of forgetfulness that allows for the play's repetitive sense of time.

Estragon laments the fact that "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes." Vladimir asks Pozzo to tell Lucky to think. Pozzo says Lucky needs his hat first, which has fallen off during the dance. Estragon doesn't want to give Lucky his hat and asks Pozzo to order Lucky to fetch it, but Pozzo wants someone to give it to him. Vladimir picks up Lucky's hat and offers it to him, but Pozzo says he must place it on Lucky's head.

Estragon and Vladimir periodically return to the blunt fact that nothing happens in their lives. Estragon's comment could easily be spoken by one of Beckett's audience members, watching a play in which nothing happens. Meanwhile, Pozzo and Lucky's absurd antics continue.

Vladimir puts the hat on Lucky's head, but Lucky does nothing. Pozzo jerks the rope around his neck and orders him to think. Lucky begins to speak, but Pozzo stops him and orders him to back up, then turn to face the audience. He orders him to think again. Lucky delivers a long, nonsensical speech marked by repeated syllables ("Acacacacademy") and pseudo-academic language.

The idea of Lucky thinking on command is humorous, but the way in which Pozzo orders Lucky around is cruel. The combination of Lucky's suffering and his ridiculous speech create an uncomfortable absurdity.

As Lucky continues, he begins describing repeatedly mountains, rivers, air, fire, stones, and the sea. He repeats phrases nonsensically, including "in spite of the tennis," and the other three characters begin to find his speech annoying and painful. They throw themselves on top of Lucky to stop him from talking, and Vladimir finally takes his hat away. Lucky falls silent. Pozzo snatches the hat and stomps on it, proclaiming, "There's an end to his thinking!"

Lucky's speech is absurd and mostly unintelligible. It is never explained why Lucky's ability to think out loud is bizarrely dependent on his wearing his hat.

Pozzo kicks Lucky and calls him a pig again. He asks Vladimir and Estragon to help pick Lucky up and hold him steady. They let go of him and he falls, so they pick him up again. Pozzo puts his bag and basket back in Lucky's hands, and Lucky regains his balance, so that Vladimir and Estragon can let go of him. Pozzo thanks the two and prepares to leave, but realizes he has misplaced his watch.

Lucky can only stand when he holds Pozzo's things. He is paradoxically dependent upon his own servitude and suffering. Similarly, Vladimir and Estragon rely upon Godot, who, since he never arrives, is also the source of their torturous boredom.

Pozzo calls for silence and he, Estragon, and Vladimir listen to see if they can hear the ticking of the watch. Pozzo asks which of the two smells so bad and Estragon answers that his feet stink, but Vladimir's breath does. Pozzo decides to leave, reasoning that he must have left his watch "at the manor."

The missing watch could symbolize the absence of a normal system of time in the play. One of the ways Beckett creates his absurd humor is by undercutting serious moments with physical humor like the characters' bad smells, which also highlights that just as Vladimir and Estragon are trapped on stage, people are trapped in their bodies.

The three characters say "adieu" but no one moves. They say it again and politely bid farewell to each other once more. No one moves. Pozzo says that he seems to be unable to leave. Estragon says, "such is life." Pozzo backs away from Lucky, and then, holding onto the rope, cracks his whip and orders Lucky to move. Lucky begins to move, with Pozzo following after.

The characters comically repeat "adieu" over and over again but are inexplicably unable to move. They seem to be somehow trapped by their own free will. "Adieu," literally means "to God," so there may be some ironic wordplay here: is there even a God in this world for the characters to go to?

As Pozzo is about to leave the stage, he calls for his stool and Vladimir gets it and gives it to him. Pozzo, Vladimir, and Estragon say "adieu" again and Pozzo leaves, shouting at Lucky. Vladimir says that this encounter with Pozzo and Lucky passed the time, and Estragon asks what they should do now. Vladimir doesn't know, so Estragon suggests they leave, but Vladimir says they can't, since they are waiting for Godot.

While uneventful, the meeting with Pozzo and Lucky at least distracted Vladimir and Estragon from their boredom. Now they are alone and bored again. Unable to leave, the characters are trapped here by their own sense of hope. Ironically, if they were to give up hope of Godot's arrival, they might be free to leave.

Vladimir comments on how much Pozzo and Lucky had changed. Estragon is confused, because they did not know this pair before, but Vladimir assures him they did and says that Estragon forgets everything. Estragon asks why Lucky and Pozzo didn't recognize them, if they knew each other, but Vladimir says, "That means nothing. I too pretended not to recognize them."

Vladimir is able to recognize people from his past, whereas Estragon's constant forgetfulness means he lives life in a kind of perpetual present. In pretending not to recognize Lucky and Pozzo, Vladimir perpetuates the cycle of characters refusing or failing to acknowledge other people's humanity and identity.

Estragon's one foot with the boot still on begins to hurt, while Vladimir ponders whether Lucky and Pozzo were the same people he knew from before, or different. A boy calls from off-stage and enters. Estragon and Vladimir yell at him to approach. The boy says he has a message from Mr. Godot. Estragon asks why the boy is so late, and the boy says it's not his fault.

Vladimir's confusion over Lucky and Pozzo's identities is linked to a confusion over time: is this day merely a repetition of the previous one, or is it a new day with different people? It is likely the former, as act two will imply (by being very similar to act one).

The boy says he was afraid of Lucky and Pozzo, which is why he is late. Vladimir asks if the boy knows Lucky and Pozzo and whether he is from "these parts." The boy doesn't know them, but is from the area. Estragon doesn't believe the boy and shakes him angrily, but Vladimir tells him to calm down.

Although the boy might be another companion or might at least have a useful message from Godot, Estragon greets him angrily and violently.

Estragon lets go of the boy and covers his face, telling Vladimir that he has been unhappy for longer than he can remember. Vladimir asks the boy to deliver his message and whether he has seen the boy before. The boy says no, and Vladimir asks if it was not him who came the day before. The boy says it wasn't him.

Again, Vladimir is attempting to ascertain to what degree his life is merely repeating itself, with the same people appearing every day and doing the same things.

The boy finally delivers his message: "Mr. Godot told me to tell you that he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow." Vladimir asks if the boy works for Godot, and the boy says he does; he looks after the goats. He says Godot is good and doesn't beat him, though he does beat the boy's brother, who minds the sheep. He says Godot feeds him well. Vladimir asks if the boy is happy, and the boy is unsure.

Godot's arrival is the entire point of the characters' waiting and of Beckett's play itself. The revelation that he will not come is at once frustrating, funny, and sad. From the boy's description, it is unclear whether Godot is really a way towards freedom or merely another form of domination, as he seems to be the boy's master.

Vladimir tells the boy he can leave, and the boy asks what message he should bring back to Godot. He asks the boy to tell Godot that he saw them. The boy leaves, as night comes. Estragon looks at the moon, saying that it is "pale for weariness." He leaves both his boots on the ground, saying that "another will come, just as...as...as me, but with smaller feet, and they'll make him happy."

Vladimir's message to Godot shows what he desperately wants: some acknowledgment of his identity and humanity. He wants to be recognized, in contrast to all of the times that characters like Lucky and Pozzo don't recognize him, day after day.

Vladimir tells Estragon he can't go on with bare feet, and Estragon says that Christ did. Vladimir thinks Estragon is ridiculous to compare himself to Christ. Vladimir says they have nothing to do here, but says that tomorrow will be better, because Godot will come tomorrow. Estragon says that they should wait here, then, but Vladimir says they must take cover during the night.

Vladimir does not escape the trap of waiting for Godot, as he eagerly looks forward to tomorrow, when he is convinced that Godot will finally come. In the play's Postmodern setting, comparisons to Christ or other Biblical characters are deemed ridiculous.

Estragon looks at the tree and says it's a pity they don't have any rope. He asks Vladimir to remind him to bring rope tomorrow. He asks Vladimir how long they've been together, and Vladimir guesses fifty years. Estragon wonders aloud if they would have been better off alone, rather than together.

The characters' nonchalant consideration of hanging themselves is eerily absurd. By Vladimir's reckoning, he and Estragon have been repeating the same things over and over again for fifty years.

Estragon says he and Vladimir "weren't made for the same road." Vladimir says that it is not certain and tells Estragon that they can still part now, if he'd like to. Estragon says it's not worth it. Estragon asks if they should go and Vladimir says, "Yes, let's go," but neither move.

Vladimir and Estragon ultimately decide to stay together as companions. The act ends with a final absurd gesture, as the characters are inexplicably trapped in their places, despite their willingness to leave now.

ACT 2

Act 2 begins the next day, at the same time and in the same place. Estragon's boots are still on the ground. Vladimir enters, examines one of Estragon's boots, and then begins to sing. He sings a nonsensical song about a dog who steals a crust of bread from a kitchen and then is beaten to death.

Act two will repeat many of the events of act one, showing how time operates repetitively in the play. Vladimir's nonsensical song is humorous, but also tragic—Lucky and Estragon are not so different from the song's suffering, physically abused dog.

Estragon enters and Vladimir tries to embrace him, but Estragon pushes him away. Vladimir asks where Estragon spent the night and whether "they" beat him. Estragon tells Vladimir not to touch him or ask him questions, but Vladimir tells Estragon to look at him. They look at each other and then embrace.

While Estragon is at first indignant, he soon embraces Vladimir, his only companion amid all his suffering (physical and otherwise).

Estragon remarks, "What a day!" and Vladimir tells him the day isn't over yet. Estragon tells him he heard his singing and Vladimir says, "one is not master of one's moods," and that he has felt good today. He tells Estragon he missed him last night, but was happy at the same time.

Vladimir's assertion that he is not in control of his own moods is both absurd and an evaluation of the radical lack of freedom in the bleak world he inhabits, and, again, a suggestion that people are in some sense controlled by their bodies as opposed to the other way around—that life itself is a kind of prison.

Estragon says he too feels better alone. Vladimir asks him why he keeps "crawling back" then, and suggests it's because Estragon can't defend himself. He says he would have stopped "them" from beating Estragon. Estragon says Vladimir couldn't have stopped them, because there were ten of them.

As Vladimir claims, Estragon is dependent on him. However, he also relies on Estragon. The two companions are codependent and lonely without each other.

Vladimir says that he would have stopped Estragon from doing whatever he did to provoke the beating, but Estragon says he wasn't doing anything, and he doesn't know why he was beaten. Vladimir says that something he was doing or something in the way he was doing it must have caused the beating, but Estragon insists, "I wasn't doing anything."

Estragon was beaten for no reason, in line with the absurd, unexplained suffering of the rest of the play. Such suffering happens for no reason at all; it happens just because you are alive.

Vladimir says that Estragon must be happy now that they are together again. Estragon is not sure but Vladimir has him repeat the words, "I am happy." Estragon then asks, "What do we do now, now that we are happy?" and Vladimir suggests they wait for Godot. Estragon wonders what will happen if Godot doesn't come, but Vladimir says that things are different today than yesterday.

Estragon suddenly and bizarrely shifts emotions and agrees that he is happy. Just as in act one, Estragon again asks Vladimir what they should do and Vladimir again answers that they should do nothing, but simply wait.

Vladimir tells Estragon to look at the nearby tree. Estragon asks if it was there yesterday and Vladimir says it was. Estragon tells him he "dreamt it," but Vladimir says he may have just forgotten about it. He asks Estragon if he forgot about Pozzo and Lucky, as well, and Estragon asks who they are.

Estragon's absurd forgetfulness allows time to repeat itself in the play, as he forgets that he has already been in this same place, doing the same thing (waiting), and encountering the same people.

Estragon remembers "a lunatic" who kicked his shins and a man who gave him a bone. Vladimir tells him those people were Lucky and Pozzo. Estragon asks if this all happened yesterday at this very place and Vladimir is amazed that Estragon doesn't recognize the place. Estragon is suddenly upset, asking, "What is there to recognize?"

Unlike Estragon, Vladimir has a memory of the past and so can realize that they are trapped in a life that keeps repeating itself. Estragon's question implies that there is nothing worth recognizing in the world, a deeply nihilistic sentiment.

Vladimir mentions "the Macon country," but Estragon says he's never been there. He says he's "puked my puke of a life away here...in the Cackon country," though Vladimir says he thought they were together in the Macon country, picking grapes for a man whose name he cannot remember. Estragon says this is possible.

Again, Estragon has no memory of the past. This means that he also lacks a sense of his own identity, of who he is, because he can't remember anything about his life.

Estragon says that things would be better if he and Vladimir parted. Vladimir says that Estragon always says this, but always comes back to him. Estragon tells him it would be best to kill him, "like the other." Vladimir asks who he is referring to, and Estragon answers, "like billions of others." He tells Vladimir that they should talk in the meantime.

Estragon keeps repeating himself, saying that he will leave Vladimir, though he never does. His reference to billions of people killed is absurd because it is never explained or mentioned again, but suggests that suffering is widespread in this world—everyone, after all, dies.

Estragon says that they should talk so they don't hear "all the dead voices," that talk about their lives, making a noise that sounds like feathers, leaves, or ashes. There is a long pause, and Vladimir urges Estragon to say something, "anything at all!" Estragon asks what they should do, and Vladimir again answers that they should wait for Godot.

When Estragon and Vladimir stop talking, they must confront the emptiness of their lives—the fact that they have nothing to do but wait for Godot. Thus they are compelled to fill their time with absurd, often nonsensical conversation.

The two struggle to find something to talk about. Vladimir says "it's the start that's difficult." He asks Estragon to help him find something to talk about, and Estragon tells him he's trying. The two disagree over whether listening prevents one from thinking. Estragon suggests they ask each other questions. Vladimir suddenly asks, "Where are all these corpses from?"

The two characters are ironically talking about how they have nothing to talk about. But Beckett quickly mixes this comedy with Vladimir's deeply troubling and unexplained reference to corpses.

Vladimir says that "to have thought" is the worst thing of all, and the two ponder whether they have ever thought. Estragon comments that they are talking well now, but Vladimir notes that now they need to find something else to talk about. They both concentrate during a long silence.

Just like talking about not being able to talk, thinking about whether one has ever thought is ironic and funny. Vladimir and Estragon desperately seek something to talk about to relieve their intense boredom.

Vladimir asks what they were talking about at the beginning of the evening, and recalls the opening of act two, when they embraced and were happy. He tells Estragon to look at the tree and notes that it has leaves, whereas yesterday it was bare. He is shocked that the leaves appeared overnight, and Estragon sees this as proof that they weren't actually here the previous day.

The tree's sudden leaves further disrupt Vladimir's sense of time, seemingly contradicting the natural cycle of the seasons. This temporal disorientation causes Estragon to continue to misunderstand time and not believe that he was here the day before.

Vladimir accepts, for the moment, that they were not in this place the previous day, and asks Estragon what they did the previous night, then. Estragon says they "blathered," about "nothing in particular." He says this has been going on for fifty years now. Vladimir asks if he remembers the sun and the moon, Lucky and Pozzo. Estragon remembers the bones Pozzo gave him and when Lucky kicked him.

For fifty years, apparently, Vladimir and Estragon have been doing nothing, as well as talking about nothing. (But, given the strangeness of time in the play, it is unclear whether we should take this measure of time literally.)

Vladimir lifts up the legs of Estragon's pants and sees the wound from Lucky's kick, which would suggest that they were here yesterday. He asks Estragon where his boots are, and Estragon doesn't know. He says he threw them away because they were hurting. Vladimir spots the boots and says they are exactly where they were left yesterday.

Unlike Estragon, who accepts his strange disorientation in time and space, Vladimir tries to pin down exactly where and when they are, and whether it's the same place they were yesterday. The boots seem proof of this.

Estragon says the boots are not his, because they are not the right color. Vladimir says someone must have taken Estragon's boots and left these other ones. Estragon says he's tired and wants to leave, but Vladimir says they can't—they have to wait here for Godot. Estragon asks what they will do, and Vladimir says there's nothing they can do.

Yet Estragon's comment that the boots aren't his raises questions: does Estragon even really remember the color of his boots? Did someone simply replace the boots? Is it possible they are in a slightly different reality than they were in act one? Estragon repeats himself again, wanting to leave and Vladimir must remind him that they are stuck here waiting for Godot, with nothing to do.

Vladimir asks if Estragon would like a radish or turnip. Estragon asks if there are any carrots; Vladimir says there are not. He finds a radish in his pocket and gives it to Estragon. Estragon rejects the radish, and says he'll go get a carrot, but he doesn't move at all.

This scene repeats a similar one from act one, but with a radish instead of a carrot. The discrepancy between Estragon saying he will go find a carrot and standing still is humorous.

Vladimir suggests that Estragon try on the boots. He says it would at least pass the time, and that he'll help Estragon put them on. He picks up one of the boots and Estragon raises up his foot. They struggle to get it on, but finally do. Estragon says the boot fits. They put the other boot on, and Estragon says the boots don't hurt, at least "not yet." He says they are too big, but Vladimir responds that he might get socks one day.

Vladimir is willing to help Estragon in order to ease his boredom. His comment about the socks is silly and comical, but at the same time pathetic—the most Estragon can hope for is to find socks some day. Now Estragon can wait for socks just like he waits for Godot.

Estragon sits down and wishes he could sleep. He tries to sleep, but Vladimir tells him to wait and begins singing loudly, repeating the word "bye." Estragon falls asleep, then wakes up and is startled. Vladimir comforts him. Estragon begins to describe his dream, but Vladimir stops him. He tells Estragon to "walk it off," and the two walk around the stage, until Estragon says he's tired. He says he'd rather do nothing than walk.

Vladimir and Estragon both need each other as companions. Here, Vladimir comforts Estragon after his dream. After walking around the stage, the characters return to doing nothing. It is not entirely clear why Vladimir doesn't want to hear Estragon's dream—it may be that such a thing is just too intimate to share in the realm of the play.

Estragon wants to leave, but Vladimir reminds him that they must stay and wait for Godot. Vladimir says Godot will come at nightfall. Estragon says after the night, it will be day again, and asks, "What'll we do, what'll we do!" Vladimir tells him to stop complaining.

Estragon begins to wonder what will happen after Godot arrives, after the thing they have been waiting for happens. Vladimir refuses to engage in such speculation.

Estragon announces that he is going to leave. Vladimir sees Lucky's hat from yesterday lying on the ground. This confirms for him that they are in the right place. He gives Estragon his hat and tries on Lucky's. Estragon puts on Vladimir's hat and gives his own to Vladimir, who puts it on instead of Lucky's, which he gives to Estragon. Estragon puts on Lucky's hat, and Vladimir puts his own hat back on before giving Estragon his hat back. They exchange the hats back and forth.

The exchange of hats back and forth playfully encapsulates the instability of identities in this play where characters fail or refuse to recognize each other and acknowledge other characters' humanity.

Vladimir asks Estragon how he looks in Lucky's hat. Estragon says he looks "hideous," and Vladimir asks if he looks more or less hideous than usual. Estragon says "neither more nor less," and Vladimir says Estragon can keep the hat, then. Estragon says he is going to leave, and Vladimir asks if he wants to "play at Pozzo and Lucky." He imitates Lucky and asks Estragon to act like Pozzo.

The idea that someone in Vladimir's desperate position would care so much about his appearance is rather absurd and comical. Vladimir's idea to act like Pozzo and Lucky raises the question of to what degree any of the characters has a stable identity aside from a similar kind of "playing." It also brings up the question of the power dynamics between any two people, given that the dynamic between Pozzo and Lucky is that of master to slave.

Vladimir encourages Estragon to yell at him like Pozzo. Estragon shouts, "Think, pig!" at Vladimir, who says he cannot. He asks Estragon to command him to dance, but Estragon says he's leaving. Vladimir pretends to be both Pozzo and Lucky. Estragon leaves for a moment and then comes back. They embrace and Vladimir says, "There you are again at last!"

When Estragon leaves even for just a moment, Vladimir becomes intensely lonely. While he earlier asserted that Estragon needed him, we now see that the two companions need each other. They are "tied" to each other.

Estragon says "they" are coming but doesn't know who they are or how many of them there are. Vladimir excitedly says that it must be Godot. He shouts, "We're saved!" Vladimir pulls Estragon toward the edge of the stage, but Estragon leaves by himself. He returns immediately and the two embrace again. Estragon says that "they" are coming, and Vladimir says he and Estragon are surrounded.

Vladimir is again lonely when Estragon leaves for hardly any time. The anonymous "they" keep Estragon and Vladimir in a state of fear and paranoia, though it is not clear who they are (or if they are even real).

Vladimir tells Estragon his only hope is to disappear. He tells Estragon to hide behind the tree. Estragon hides behind it, but realizes the tree does not cover him completely. Estragon asks Vladimir what to do, and he answers, "there's nothing to do."

Estragon's lame attempt at hiding behind the tree is comical. There is nothing for Vladimir and him to do in this situation, or in general.

Estragon brings Vladimir to the right edge of the stage and tells him to be on the lookout. He does the same at the left edge. He asks if Vladimir sees anything coming. Neither of them does. They try to speak at the same time and each politely tell the other to speak first. Their back-and-forth politeness turns into an argument, and Estragon enthusiastically suggests that they pass the time insulting each other.

The characters' exaggerated politeness is absurd and funny, as well as an abrupt change of mood. They suddenly don't seem very worried about the people Estragon thought he heard coming. Are they really in danger? The audience doesn't know what to take seriously and what to laugh at.

They insult each other back and forth and then Estragon decides it's time to make up. They embrace. "How time flies when one has fun!" muses Vladimir. Estragon asks what they should do now, and Vladimir suggests they continue waiting. He says they could do some exercises. They hop from one foot to the other, standing in place. Vladimir suggests they "do the tree," balancing on one foot.

Vladimir and Estragon bizarrely have fun throwing insults back and forth. But, after this brief entertainment they return to their usual activity of waiting and doing nothing. Their desire to be doing anything at all leads to their absurd activities, like "doing the tree."

Pozzo and Lucky enter. Lucky has the rope around his neck as before, and is carrying the same things, but now Pozzo is blind, following closely behind Lucky. Lucky stops when he sees Estragon and Vladimir, and Pozzo continue walking until he bumps into Lucky. Pozzo asks who it is, and Lucky falls down, bringing Pozzo down with him.

Pozzo and Lucky arrive, just like yesterday, though now Pozzo is blind. While Lucky is under Pozzo's control, Pozzo now relies on Lucky, since he can't see. Their codependent relationship is comparable to the companionship of Vladimir and Estragon.

Estragon asks if this is Godot. Vladimir says, "Reinforcements at last!" He says that now they will surely make it through the evening. Pozzo asks for help. Vladimir says that he and Estragon are finally no longer alone, and that now time "flows again already." Estragon says he knew it was Godot, but Vladimir corrects him: it's Pozzo. Pozzo, meanwhile, is still lying on the ground, asking for help. Estragon wants to leave, but Vladimir tells him they are still waiting for Godot.

Vladimir sees the arrival of Pozzo and Lucky as an opportunity to be distracted from his boredom. With them, time seems to "flow again." Estragon does not recognize Pozzo and ignores his plea for help. Vladimir must remind Estragon yet again that they have to stay and wait for Godot.

Vladimir says that Pozzo might have another chicken bone for Estragon, and suggests that they help him up. Estragon asks why Pozzo can't get up and Vladimir says he doesn't know. Pozzo writhes on the ground, unable to stand up. Estragon suggests that they ask Pozzo for a bone before helping him. Vladimir agrees, but worries that Lucky might "get going," and stop them from taking advantage of Pozzo in this way.

Pozzo's inability to get up is somewhat comic as well as tragic and pathetic. Whereas Vladimir was sympathetic to Lucky in act one, here he and Estragon are indifferent to Pozzo's suffering and seek to get something out of helping him up.

Confused, Estragon asks who Lucky is, and Vladimir reminds him of how Lucky kicked Estragon the previous day. He points to Lucky, who is motionless. Estragon asks if they should beat Lucky, and Vladimir says that sounds like a good idea, but he isn't sure if Lucky is asleep or not. He says it would be better "to take advantage of Pozzo's calling for help."

Estragon fails to recognize Lucky's identity. Vladimir and Estragon have gone from doing nothing to stop the suffering of Lucky and Pozzo to plotting to help continue their suffering.

Pozzo continues to cry out for help. Vladimir says that he and Estragon should "do something, while we have the chance." He ponders the situation and whether he and Estragon are needed. He wonders aloud what they are doing here, and then says that the answer is that they are waiting for Godot, or at least for nightfall. He says he and Estragon have kept their appointment. Pozzo again cries out for help.

Vladimir rightly concludes that all he and Estragon are doing is waiting. His absurd, rambling thoughts take precedence over helping a fellow suffering human. Waiting for Godot interferes with helping a fellow in trouble.

Vladimir continues to talk, so Pozzo shouts that he'll pay someone to help him. Estragon asks how much. He says he'd pay one hundred francs, and Estragon says this isn't enough. Pozzo offers two hundred francs. Vladimir says they are "bored to death." He doesn't want to let this potential "diversion" go to waste, so he tries to help Pozzo up, but fails several times and falls down. He asks Estragon to help, but Estragon says he's leaving.

Vladimir thought taking money from Pozzo was beneath his dignity in act one, but now he is ready to take money in return for helping Pozzo, if only so he has something to do while he is "bored to death." In trying to help, Vladimir falls down himself, a pathetic but darkly comic development.

Vladimir begs Estragon not to leave. He and Pozzo both ask Estragon for help. Vladimir promises that he will leave with Estragon if he will help Pozzo and him. Estragon asks if they can leave and never come back. Vladimir says they can go wherever he wants, if he helps.

Vladimir is so desperate not to lose Estragon (and to get up from the ground) that he even promises to abandon waiting for Godot.

Estragon again says he's going to leave. Vladimir says he'll just get up himself, but he is unable to. Estragon asks if Vladimir is going to stay here, and finally extends a hand to help him up. Vladimir pulls on Estragon's hand while trying to get up, and Estragon falls, as well.

Vladimir's unexplained inability to get up is absurd, but can also be seen as a comment on Postmodern life, with Vladimir trapped, but yet constrained by no one in particular. And any effort to help, as Estragon does, results in even more people getting trapped.

Pozzo asks who Estragon and Vladimir are, and Vladimir answers that they are men. Vladimir asks Estragon if he can get up, and he says he doesn't know, but he can't at the moment. Estragon suggests they sleep while they're stuck on the ground. Pozzo continues to cry out, "Pity! Pity!" and Vladimir hits him to shut him up. Pozzo begins to crawl away, and then collapses. Estragon asks, "What do we do now?"

Like Estragon, Pozzo does not remember yesterday and thus fails to recognize Estragon and Vladimir. Pozzo's crawling around on the ground is a strange mix of slapstick comedy and pathetic suffering. Vladimir responds to this suffering violently.

Vladimir says he could crawl over to Pozzo, but Estragon doesn't want Vladimir to leave him. They both call over to Pozzo, but he doesn't respond. Estragon asks if Vladimir is sure that Pozzo is the right name. Vladimir says he thinks Pozzo is dying. Estragon says it would be fun to try calling out different names, to see if Pozzo might respond, but Vladimir says that he is sure the man's name is Pozzo.

Now it is Estragon who irrationally fears losing Vladimir, showing that the two rely on each other mutually. Estragon is comically enthusiastic about trying different names for Pozzo, whom he still fails to recognize from the previous day.

Estragon shouts, "Abel! Abel!" and Pozzo cries out for help. Estragon thinks Abel is the right name. He thinks Lucky might be called Cain, and shouts this name out loud. Pozzo shouts for help again. Estragon suggests he and Vladimir find a new topic of conversation, but neither can think of anything to talk about. Estragon suggests they try to get up, and they both get up easily. Pozzo shouts for help yet again.

Estragon's name mix-up, with its reference to Cain and Abel of the Bible, is absurd and shows the ironic distance between the western tradition of the Bible and this Postmodern world. The absurdity continues with Estragon and Vladimir again talking about having nothing to talk about and then suddenly being able to stand up.

Estragon wants to leave, but Vladimir reminds him yet again that they are waiting here for Godot. Estragon asks what they will do in the meantime, and Vladimir says they could help Pozzo get up. They help Pozzo stand up, but when they let go, he falls down again. They help him up again and hold him steady between them.

Estragon repeats his desire to leave yet again, but he and Vladimir are still kept here waiting. Pozzo's inability to stand is darkly comic—humorous, but pathetic at the same time.

Pozzo asks who Vladimir and Estragon are, because he is blind and cannot see them. Estragon wonders if he can see into the future, since he is blind. Pozzo asks if they are his friends, and Vladimir says they have proven that they are, by helping him up. Pozzo begs them not to leave him, and Vladimir says they won't. "For the moment," Estragon specifies.

Pozzo seems just as desperate for company as Estragon and Vladimir. While he is Lucky's master, he seems hardly any better off than Lucky. Everyone seems to suffer in the bleak world of Beckett's play.

Pozzo asks what time it is, and Estragon and Vladimir look at the sky, guessing seven or eight o'clock in the evening. Estragon isn't sure whether it's the evening or dawn, but Vladimir is sure it's evening. Pozzo again asks what time it is, and Vladimir assures him it's evening, in spite of what Estragon may think.

Estragon and Vladimir disagree over the time. While Vladimir seems correct, given the strange functioning of time in the play, one can't be entirely sure. The audience is left in a state of temporal disorientation.

Estragon asks how long he and Vladimir will have to hold up Pozzo for. Pozzo says he used to have excellent sight, and that he woke up one day completely blind. He says he's not sure if he's still asleep or awake. Vladimir asks if this happened yesterday, and Pozzo angrily replies that "the blind have no notion of time."

Like Estragon, Pozzo lacks a normal sense of time. He is content to stay in this disoriented state, whereas Vladimir struggles to establish a stable chronology of events. Vladimir is always looking to explain what may not be explainable, suggesting the limits of reason and rationality,

Estragon says he is leaving. Pozzo asks where they are, and Vladimir says he doesn't know. Pozzo asks if they are at the place called the Board, which Vladimir hasn't heard of. Pozzo asks Vladimir to describe their surroundings. Vladimir says, "It's indescribable. It's like nothing. There's nothing. There's a tree." Pozzo says that it is not the Board, then.

Not only do the characters not know when they are, but they also don't know where they are. Vladimir's attempt to describe the place is rather nihilistic: ultimately, there's nothing much to see here.

Pozzo asks where Lucky is, and why he isn't responding to his call. Vladimir says Lucky seems to be sleeping, but might be dead. Pozzo asks Vladimir or Estragon to go check on Lucky and see if he is okay. Estragon doesn't want to go, since Lucky kicked him, but Pozzo asks for Estragon to go, because he stinks.

The more serious elements of the play are counterbalanced by moments of simple humor, like Pozzo wanting Estragon to go check on Lucky because he smells bad. Again, though, such physical disgust is a reminder that the body is physical, and that all life is trapped in this physicality.

Estragon doesn't move. Vladimir asks Estragon what he is waiting for, and Estragon answers that he is waiting for Godot. Pozzo tells Estragon to pull on Lucky's rope to get his attention. If that doesn't work, he suggests kicking him. Estragon asks what would happen if Lucky were to defend himself, but Pozzo says Lucky never defends himself. Estragon approaches Lucky.

Estragon comically misinterprets Vladimir's question and thinks that Vladimir has forgotten that they are waiting for Godot. Pozzo's cruel suggestion of kicking Lucky and assurance that Lucky won't defend himself show how Lucky has been robbed of his dignity.

Estragon checks if Lucky is still breathing (he is) before starting to kick him repeatedly. He hurts his foot in the process and limps away. Lucky begins to move. Estragon tries to take off one of his boots, but gives up and sits down to sleep.

In causing Lucky pain, Estragon ends up hurting himself. This is both comical and an encapsulation of how causing suffering harms both the victim and the perpetrator.

Pozzo asks what has just happened, and Vladimir explains. Vladimir asks him if he and Lucky are the same Pozzo and Lucky from the day before. Pozzo says he doesn't remember meeting anyone yesterday. But, he says, he won't remember meeting Vladimir today, so he might have. Vladimir reminds him of the previous day, and how Pozzo was bringing Lucky to a fair to sell him away.

Vladimir is now starting to doubt his understanding of time and recognition of Pozzo and Lucky.

Pozzo shouts, "Up pig!" and Lucky gets up and gathers his things. Vladimir asks where Pozzo is going, and he simply says, "On." Lucky puts the rope that is tied around his neck in Pozzo's hand, and gives him his whip. Vladimir asks Pozzo what's in the bag Lucky carries. The bag is filled with sand. Vladimir asks what Pozzo does when he falls and no one is around to help. Pozzo says he waits until he can get up, and then he continues walking.

Lucky's bag that he lugs around with him is filled with nothing but sand. As a darkly comic touch, there is no purpose to his suffering in carrying it around. Equally absurd is Pozzo's random and unexplained inability and ability to get up at different times.

Vladimir asks Pozzo to have Lucky sing, think, or recite something. Pozzo says Lucky is mute, and "can't even groan." Pozzo is frustrated with all of Vladimir's questions related to time, which he insists does not matter. He and Lucky leave the stage. Vladimir walks over to Estragon and wakes him.

Vladimir still tries to establish a normal sense of time, but Pozzo will have none of his time-related questioning.

Estragon asks why Vladimir won't let him sleep. Vladimir says he was lonely. Estragon begins to describe his dream, saying that he dreamt he was happy, but Vladimir angrily tells him not to describe his dream. He wonders whether Pozzo was really blind.

Vladimir is again lonely when Estragon sleeps and leaves him by himself.

Estragon says, "let's go," but then remembers they can't. He asks if Vladimir is sure that Pozzo wasn't actually Godot. Vladimir says he's certain, but then he says, "I don't know what to think any more." Estragon tries to get his boots off and asks Vladimir for help.

Estragon keeps on forgetting that he and Vladimir are bound to stay and wait for Godot. Vladimir now doubts his own knowledge of people's identities—the rationalist begins to doubt his ability to understand the world. Estragon relies on Vladimir's help for even minor things like taking off a boot.

Vladimir wonders if he himself is sleeping at this very moment. He ponders what he will say of this day tomorrow and laments the fact that Estragon will not remember this day and they'll have to go through the same conversations all over again. He says he can't go on, but then stops and asks, "What have I said?"

Vladimir's questioning of reality and confusion of reality with a dream is a common feature of Postmodernism. The constant repetition of time in the play is beginning to wear on Vladimir.

The boy from yesterday enters. Vladimir asks if the boy recognizes him, but the boy says he doesn't and that he didn't come yesterday. Vladimir asks if the boy has a message from Godot, which the boy does: Godot will not come this evening, but he will come tomorrow. Vladimir asks if the boy ran into Pozzo and Lucky, and the boy says he didn't see anyone on the way over.

The boy repeats his message from yesterday, keeping Vladimir and Estragon waiting. Despite Vladimir's plea for the boy to remember seeing Vladimir, he fails to recognize him.

Vladimir asks the boy what Mr. Godot does. The boy says Godot does nothing. Vladimir asks whether Godot has a beard and what color it is. The boy says that Godot has a white beard. The boy asks if Vladimir would like to send a message back to Godot. Vladimir tells the boy to tell Godot that he saw Vladimir.

Vladimir repeats his message from the day before, wanting someone to acknowledge and remember him as an individual. According to the boy, Godot does nothing, just like Vladimir and Estragon.

Vladimir grabs the boy and violently asks him, "You're sure that you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!" The boy runs off, as the moon rises and night comes. Estragon says he's leaving, and Vladimir says he'll leave as well. Estragon asks how long he was asleep for, and Vladimir doesn't know.

Vladimir desperately wants for someone else to affirm his sense of identity and time. He needs some affirmation that the world is objectively as he sees it, and that he has a place in that world. Instead of the constant repetition of people forgetting him.

Estragon wants to go far away, but Vladimir says they can't go far, because they have to come back tomorrow to wait for Godot. Estragon asks if Godot came and whether it's too late for him to come tonight. Estragon asks what would happen if they "dropped" Godot. Vladimir says Godot would punish them. He says everything is dead, except for the tree.

Despite all of the pain caused by waiting for Godot, Vladimir still feels compelled to come back tomorrow and do it again. The events of Beckett's play could repeat indefinitely.

The two go up to the tree and examine it. Estragon suggests they hang themselves, but they don't have any rope. Estragon says they could use his belt, but then there would be nothing to hang Vladimir with. Vladimir asks to look at Estragon's belt. He takes off his belt and his oversized pants fall to the ground. Vladimir wonders whether the belt would be strong enough to hang either of them with.

Estragon repeats his uncomfortably casual suggestion of suicide from yesterday. Yet even the possible dignity of suicide—of making a choice for oneself in the face of the meaninglessness of the world—is mocked when he makes an undignified fool of himself, taking his belt off and his pants fall down.

Vladimir and Estragon pull on either end of the belt to test its strength. It breaks. Estragon asks if they have to come back to this place tomorrow, and Vladimir says they must. Estragon says they should bring some rope with them next time. Then, he says he "can't go on like this," and says that it might be better if he and Vladimir parted. Vladimir says they will hang themselves tomorrow, unless Godot arrives.

There is something humorous in the belt breaking so easily, which jars with the intense sadness of the play's ending. Doomed to keep waiting, Vladimir and Estragon can do nothing—not even kill themselves. They have no control about what will happen or where they can go, or even over whether they will live at all.

Estragon asks if they can leave. Vladimir tells him to pull up his pants. Estragon misunderstands, and asks if Vladimir wants him to pull down his pants. Vladimir repeats himself and Estragon pulls his pants up. Vladimir asks if Estragon is ready to go. He says, "Yes, let's go," but neither of them move.

Just as they ended the last act, Vladimir and Estragon say they are ready to leave but don't move an inch. They end the play as they began it, trapped in this bleak place, with nothing to do.

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